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...with Borrowed Sperm, into a Modern Family

...into the Israeli Army (with Mom)

...into—and out of—Lubavitch Life

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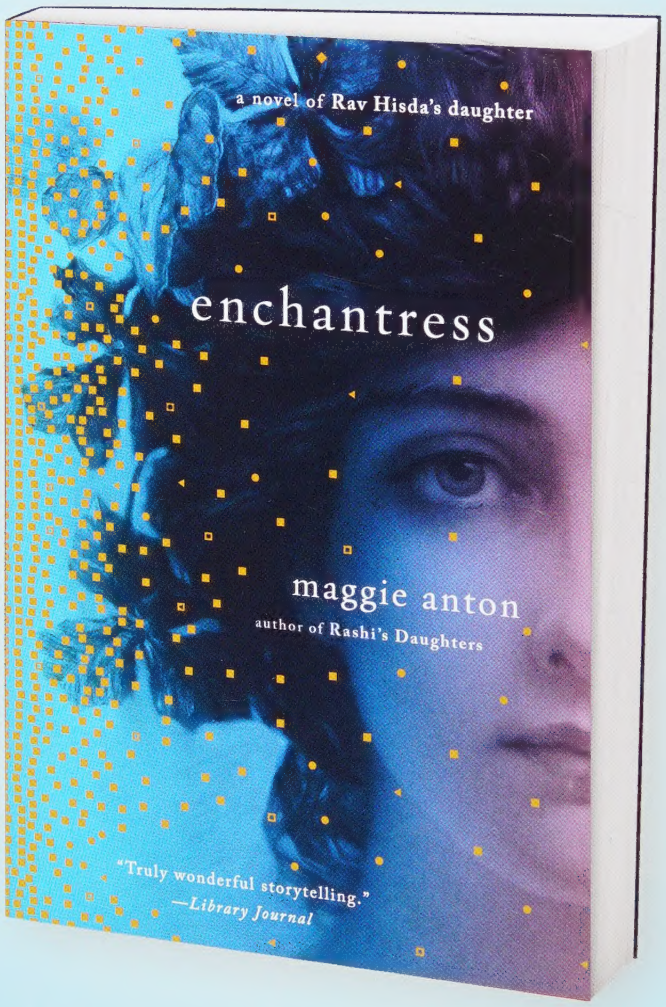

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Lilith

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In the Garden of Eden, long before the eating of the apple, the Holy One created the first human beings—a man, Adam, and a woman, Lilith. Lilith said, "We are equal; we come from the same earth." (Alphabet of Ben Sira, 23a-b)

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"Money is the bio-fuel that sustains transformative change."
— Nessa Rapoport

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Lilith
independent, Jewish & frankly feminist

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ILLUSTRATION: NICOLE HOLLANDER

This has been an extraordinary season of news on every front, including (but not limited to) several stories that have had particular resonance for women and for media. Among them: Rolling Stone magazine's much-discussed coverage of campus rape, followed by an ugly round of victim-bashing after parts of the story were challenged; the resignation of almost the entire staff of the 100-year-old New Republic magazine and the subsequent round of discussions on how a venerable print brand can keep its balance in the roiling mix of digital media sources, and the fact that for many people social media feeds have become the most consistent news feeds.

The impact of stories like these loom large for Lilith readers, and some are unprecedented in content and scale. Our national conversation about race, the Barry Freundel mikveh scandal, and the rise of women politicians in Israel and the U.S. as preface to the next round of elections are just three of them. All are subjects Lilith has covered, in print and on the Lilith blog—and we will continue to write about them with this magazine's characteristic nuance.

Lilith magazine launched in 1976 with two founding missions: to use the power of independent media to gain greater access for women (and greater value for women's concerns) in the Jewish world, and to speak with a Jewish voice on urgent women's issues. I think Lilith's tagline says a lot about our approach. "Independent, Jewish and frankly feminist," Lilith charts Jewish women's lives with exuberance, rigor, affection, subversion and style.

Yet at the same time as mega-stories are breaking, and are being bruited in the office, online, and in Lilith salons, there are smaller-scale, more deeply personal narratives that lurk beneath the surface, stories that are huge in the lives of the women they affect but don't always make it into the headlines. These, too, are Lilith's beat: the regrets of some people who have never had children; the strong feelings of those who take justifiable umbrage at the assumption that every woman wants to be a mother; and the challenges faced by same-sex female couples looking for a sperm donor. In this issue, for example, Ilana Kramer probes the experiences of gay and lesbian couples wanting to have children and deciding if the other-sex biological parent will be someone they know, or a stranger.

When we edit a story like this one, we're very conscious of who's left out. What about a single woman wanting to have children? Where does she turn for a sperm donor? What about couples trying to have a child, whether by birth or adoption, who are tripped up by financial or personal or bureaucratic stumbling blocks? Fertility challenges are a nexus where the personal, the political and the communal all intersect.

Those for whom infertility can bring, monthly, the bitter taste of disappointment wrestle with how they will have children when the standard method of conception fails them. We hear how the heartache, frustration and economic toll can be as overwhelming as the physical challenges. So the article here about a couple who manage to conceive after only two cycles of trying, in a wonderfully low-tech D-I-Y fashion—using not costly high-tech medical interventions but a simple syringe and a jar of sperm kept warm on a bicycle ride home—can trigger pain for some readers. A story hugely validating for some, and a source of curiosity-fulfillment for others, may for one cohort just spur sadness.

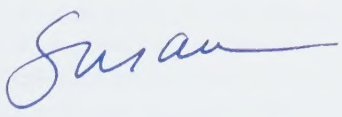
Perhaps because women and men today are older when they are ready to consider having children—and hence less fertile—this cohort appears to be growing. (And you've heard the perpetual outcry about the dropping birthrate among non-Orthodox Jews.)

Here is one possible source of succor for people who might need help in creating their families. Assuaging at least some of the financial problems and the feelings of exclusion from a community full of ubiquitous Instagram or Facebook photos of other people's kids lighting Hanukkah candles or making challah, would be a fund to help Jews afford the high cost of adoption or assisted reproduction. The cost of one cycle of IVF can be $15,000. Some Hebrew Free Loan societies offer interest-free loans for adoption and fertility treatments, but these sums will barely cover one round of treatment, and often many rounds are necessary. Plus, a loan has to be repaid. Especially for a single woman—who may lose income once she's taking care of a child—an outright grant would be more effective in enabling her to become a parent.

A modest proposal: create a fertility fund.

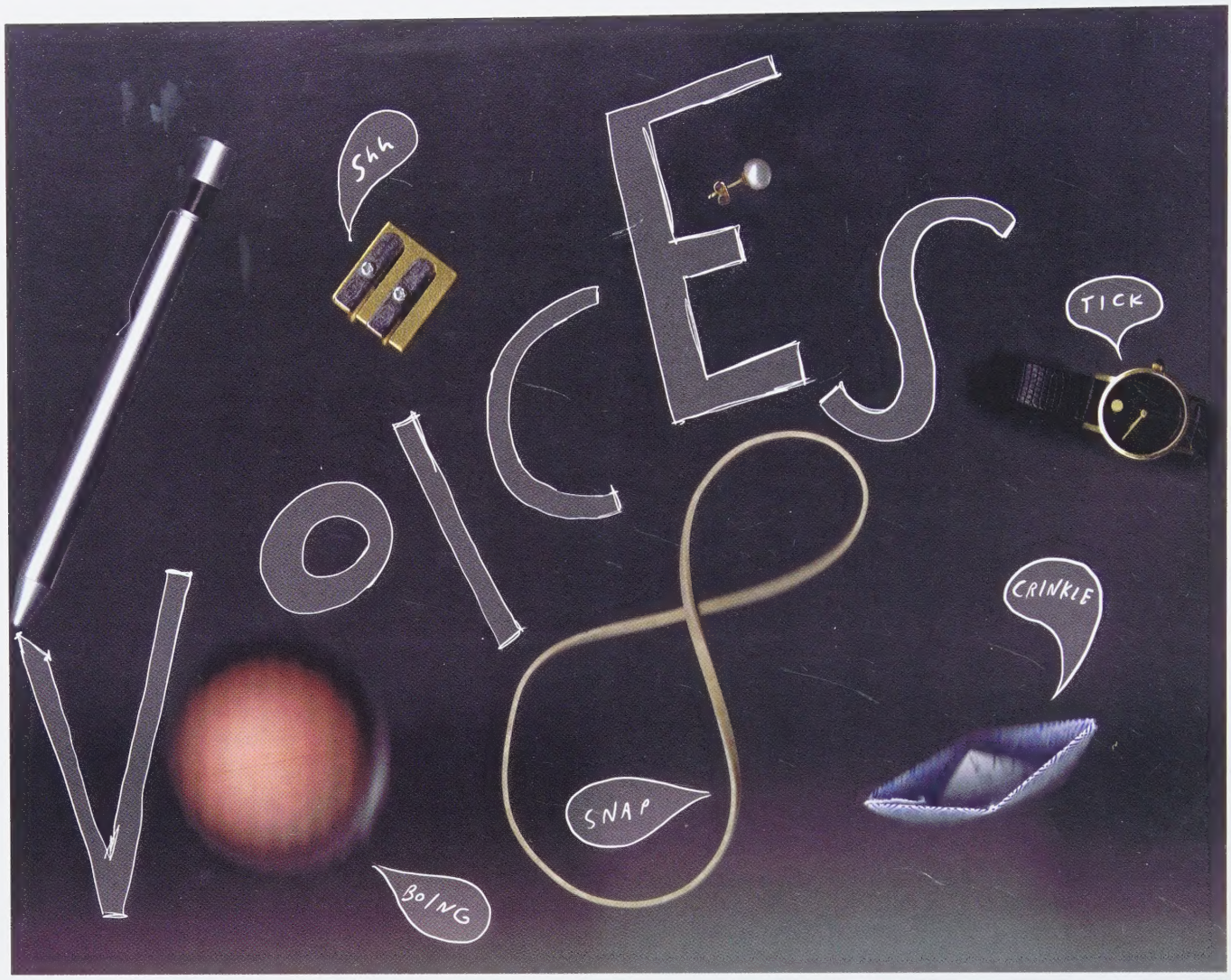
So here's a modest proposal. Jewish women's foundations, now funding projects to empower women and girls in many communities, could spur the creation of a national fund to help defray the costs of fertility interventions. Perhaps a percentage of each contribution to these community foundations could be earmarked for such a fertility fund. After all, for about a century, there has been a fund for Jewish women's education, and for decades there has been much-needed funding for reproductive-rights work. There will be challenges to creating and managing any fund that makes grants to individuals, but San Francisco's Hebrew Free Loan Society says it well: the process should be "personalized, confidential, and respectful."

Then the small-scale stories become a larger story, played out under a bigger tent.



Susan Weidman Schneider
Editor in Chief

PHOTO: DAVID GREENSPUN



BRINGING PEOPLE TO JUDAISM

A Beit Din Without the Beards

"I have a question," asked S., my first conversion student, a serious and cerebral college student. "I know we've covered the High Holidays, and I understand what they are, and all of that. But the thing about Yom Kippur—how am I supposed to *feel*?"

No one had ever asked me that before; in fact, I'm not sure anyone ever told me that before. Once asked, it seemed the most obvious question in the world. We talked about it for the better part of an hour, this young man and I, about the shadings between fear and awe, about hope and solemnity. It was the first time that I learned about Judaism from someone on the path to becoming Jewish, though definitely not the last.

I was teaching him because my wife, Rachel—with her packed schedule as small-town rabbi and Hillel advisor—asked me to. How could I prepare someone to become Jewish? Sure, I co-taught our own rural Hebrew school and had worked for Jewish organizations all my life, had lived in Israel for a year, expounding *ad infinitum* about Jewish history to others on my fellowship. But explaining Judaism—and processing what for so many born-Jews is perpetually unexamined—turned out to be a different matter altogether.

In the two years since that first experience, I have worked with 12 conversion students, teaching in our local coffee shop, our dank synagogue classroom, and in other states (God bless Google, seriously). I love the questions people ask. *Why does the Hebrew root of the word for sanctification imply set-apartedness? What do you mean most Jewish law doesn't come from the Bible? Why is Shabbat 25 hours and not 24? If there's not a Hell, how does God punish bad people?* Sometimes, I don't know the answers. More often, there isn't just one answer, and the struggle to accept that exemplifies why converts are so often our best and brightest.

How people have ended up learning with me varies wildly. Those in our community, who maybe know the synagogue but have never been, or who live close enough to have heard of us, might reach out to Rachel, the most public Jew around. Others begin attending services and hear about classes I teach—including Intro to Judaism. A friend two hours away wished aloud that she could learn the laws of kashrut, which led to an entire class series taught online and captured on film. A professor at the local college thinks she might have some hidden Jewish ancestry, and is panting to learn more. A non-Jewish partner was considering conversion before she ever

VOICES ILLUSTRATION BY LIANA FINCK

PAY INEQUITY IN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

"Women leaders can still expect to earn only 81 cents to every dollar that male CEOs earn. That this salary gap persists in 2014 is an embarrassment to our community."

Jane Eisner, editor of the Jewish Daily Forward, on the Forward's annual survey of salaries paid to executives in Jewish organizations.

REPORTING ON RAPE: WHY THE STORY APPEARS TO SHIFT

"It is incredibly difficult for traumatized people to tell an accurate story, even if they are trying to do so.... The problem, I came to realize, was not that people were making up stories, but that the details that seemed important to me were not what mattered to them."

Amanda Taub, in "The lesson of Rolling Stone and UVA: protecting victims means checking their stories," *vox.com*.

met her Jewish husband-to-be. Shockingly mature college students have decided this is the way they want to bring meaning into their lives. A small congregation in rural Virginia found my YouTube series, the recorded classes I left up after the online series ended. They have no teacher to guide their conversion cohort of five, and want to know: could I do it, maybe? I haven't said no yet, though my enthusiasm is always tempered with a little bit of dread, and solemnity. Is this the time I'm going to seriously misrepresent Judaism to someone?

What I did not know but should have perhaps guessed is that this work is deeply intimate. I am a happily agnostic observant Conservative Jew, and discussing spirituality and my feelings is not an area of natural comfort for me. Yet zoom in on a recent lesson, one in which my student asks me, "Why does God let bad people go unpunished, at least in the short term?" I start in via Maimonides. "No," she presses. "I want to know what you think about God." There's a long pause before I can even begin to answer.

And there's more. In part because of my relationship with my students and in part because frankly we are a little hard up for observant Jews here in Maine, I've begun sitting on the *beit din*—the Jewish religious court. I didn't actually even know that non-rabbis could do this until I moved to sparsely populated Maine, yet here I am. And if I myself automatically assumed that my inclusion in the decision-making body somehow rendered those conversions suspect, might not other people? Might not other *institutions* in the Jewish world?

But my initial reaction to serving on the beit din, or being asked to—that automatic impulse that surely I couldn't count—was born out of unfamiliarity and ignorance. As someone who was born Jewish, I'd never really thought about conversion much at all. When I had, I had the mental image you might expect—a couple of older rabbis (male, obviously) looking down severely at a quivering supplicant.

And as we know from recent news stories, the experience can be freighted with gender- and age-related power dynamics, though surely most male rabbis work as hard as possible to keep that from being the case. Yet I've been told of conversions in which applicants were told to wait months before mikvah could be scheduled, told they needed to pay a fee, told to wait to be contacted only to continue waiting and waiting.

That's not the case with those who find Judaism via our little shul. I've never seen a beit din that was less than two-thirds female, and the ones I've been on are usually entirely female. Though there are moments of solemnity and tears, there is always laughter, and usually at least a little chocolate, as the rabbinical court sits around the same small round table as the convert. I have learned about the kind of joy that is still and calm. There are always, always hugs, which somehow never figured in my imagined scenario with the beards and the fierce scowls and the sitting in judgment.

Nor, I guess, did I imagine the ridiculous *tachlis* parts of a conversion. I'm not just pointing to the 20 email conversations to book a date, book the mikvah, wait—who's going to turn it on ahead of time so that the water can warm up? No, I'm pointing to me in the mikvah, pantless and thigh-deep, scooping out a handful of bugs with a paper napkin while cheerfully reassuring the mercifully unaware convert waiting in the bathroom that we were *almost ready, just one more minute!* This is me, remembering to grab an extra box of tissues as we close the door to the rabbi's study behind us, ushering a spouse or best friend or child into the room with an encouraging *of course you can come in too!* Here I am—endlessly bemused, amused, and still a little surprised to find myself one of the guardians of the gates, a coach and a guide to this thing called Judaism.

When people express incredulity that I'm still here, somewhere far away and cold, so unlike the Jewish metropolis I come from, I explain: what a precious thing it is to have someone invite you to stand inside her life with her, to help mold it and alter it.

MELANIE WEISS

PHOTO OF MIKVEH: MAYYIM HAYYIM LIVING WATERS COMMUNITY MIKVEH AND EDUCATION CENTER, NEWTON, MA.

ON NOT PATHOLOGIZING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

"Many women report losing their desire for sex, some temporarily, some permanently. Is this a relationship problem, a normal aspect of life changes or, as the pharmaceutical industry maintains, an 'unmet medical need'?.... Many of these concerns can be remedied without drugs or medical procedures."

Ellen Laan and **Leonore Tiefer**, in "The Sham Drug Idea of the Year: 'Pink Viagra'" at *LATimes.com*.

THEATER

Making the Audience Feel Smarter

Chaos, hats, and chairs. Cartoon jazz jaunts. Performers percolate. Has the show started? As we take our chairs, they take theirs—on stage.

We are blithely told to turn off our phones OR leave them on: "*Our wish is for you to get a message during our show that changes your life.*"

From first chirp, "Odd Birdz," which had a month-long run in New York City in the fall, promises to be unpredictable.

Blackout. Smoke machine. Staccato light flashes. This Israeli troupe of nine performers, women and men known collectively as **Tziporela**, greets us with a sequence of staged snapshot vignettes—posing as audience members looking out at us, the real audience. We are reflected as rapt, clueless, sleepy, impatient, dull, hungry, passionately romantic... and very pretty! The cast is spunk-funky gorgeous. How kind they are to allow us schlubs to be them.

Blackout. Smoke. A sexy woman in profile wears lipstick (on the side we see). She lip-syncs *Love is Strange*. Her face turns 180 degrees, no lipstick, chin jutted, she adds a fedora. Now she's a man in profile to lip-sync *This Thing Called Love*. Flip, he's a she. Flip, she's a he. This solo performer speak-sings a conversation wholly in pop song lyrics. But it's more than just a virtuoso character swap. The concept resonates as a portrait of how we might zigzag within ourselves when obsessing about love.

Blackout. Smoke. A man and a woman, dating online, meet in person for the first time. They speak in "Mad-Libs," so each one fills in a blank left by the other. He: *No matter where I go...* She: *I never come*. Their banter zings like captions, wittier than ordinary dialogue. Most comedy is flung at you. Theirs gets inside you, by inviting you to participate in mentally guessing what might be next. You're not just watching something funny, you get to ride in the funny car with them. Mercifully without the annoyance of boorish audience participation, the kind that plucks a person from the crowd to serve as stooge, "Odd Birdz" works to make the audience feel smarter, not stupider.

And they put the sketch in sketch comedy. A man and woman sporting several layers of white t-shirts wield markers, drawing on each other (and themselves) to doodle-mime the sweet and sour story of their undulating flirtation. Suddenly these actors are not just people, but markers who uncap themselves to personify a live cartoon! What's perfect about this sketch is that it has to be experienced. A description flattens it, because it's not necessarily about the details of each action.

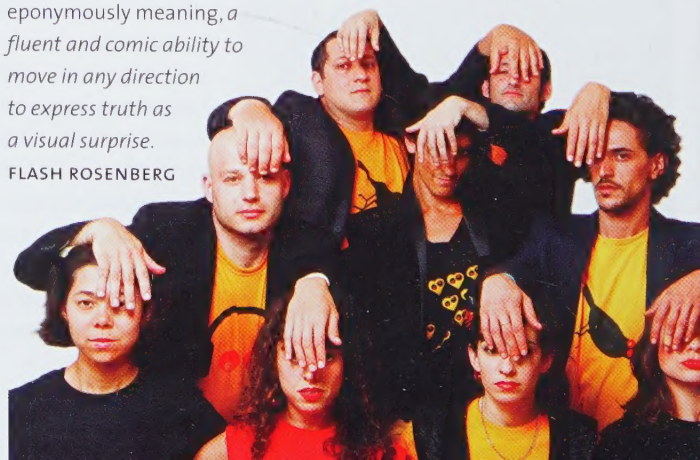
Instead it's the gestalt of a complex relationship air-kissed into a favorite cartoon.

The most breathtaking scene starts with a woman, almost like a character in a Feiffer cartoon, who presents: *A Dance to Set the Table*. It's comic, frantic, worrisome, and beautiful—the way preparing for any dinner party feels. Others help, some get in they way. Suddenly exhausted, the dancer collapses on the table.

And as she slowly lifts her legs, we see she has drawings of a man and a woman on the soles of her feet. Her legs are now a puppeteer. The base of a wine glass rises to become the sun. Forks turn into birds. It's as if the stage just rotated, and the story living on the bottom can now be told.

And it's this constant turning things over that feels most Jewish to me about "Odd Birdz." The show is a theatrical embodiment of being able to read our lives from left to right, right to left, bottom to top. It's the mix in the mind of English and Hebrew as an idea, not necessarily a language. It's why this show feels so original, even as it camps on elements of classic improv and sketch comedy. I can't locate what the word "Tziporela" officially means. But I now plan to use it as an English word eponymously meaning, *a fluent and comic ability to move in any direction to express truth as a visual surprise.*

FLASH ROSENBERG



ONCE STEALTHY, NOW EXPOSED

Rabbi Barry Freundel, longtime spiritual leader of the Modern Orthodox synagogue Kesher Israel in Washington, D.C., has been arrested on charges of voyeurism for having spied upon—and recorded—women undressing and dressing at the mikveh next door to the shul.

Some of the women were preparing to immerse in the ritual bath to mark the end of their menstrual cycle, some as part of the final step in conversion to Judaism, some for reasons of their own accounting perhaps. For all who have used that mikveh in recent months, there's uneasiness about whose images are on the recording device that Freundel secreted in a digital clock in a mikveh dressing room. But the anxiety—and anger—spread well beyond those who might have been affected directly by the sordid crime of which Freundel is accused. The scandal is about violation, about power over women whose conversion to Judaism would include mikveh immersion, and more.

Susan Weidman Schneider, on the Lilith Blog.

I don't know what percent of the water in the mikveh is actually made up of women's tears, but I suspect it's a lot.

"Why Rabbi Freundel's Story Makes Me Physically Ill," **Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg** on the Forward's Sisterhood blog.

Imagine a young Orthodox woman being forced, against her will, to marry an older man who disgusts her. Seeing no way out, she commits suicide—by drowning herself in a mikveh. Now imagine another young Orthodox woman being forced to marry an older man who repulses her. After three months of beatings, forced sex, and her husband refusing to grant her a get, she commits suicide—again by drowning herself in a mikveh.

Sound unlikely? I might have thought so once, but now I no longer do. The above plot lines belong to two stories out of the more than 200 stories published so far in the online literary journal I edit, *Jewish Fiction.net*. These two stories leaped to mind as soon as the Freundel affair broke, because out of the eight stories about mikvehs submitted to us over the past four years, only two portrayed mikvehs in a positive light; all the other six had plot lines involving what I've come to think of as "mikveh suicides."

From "Mikveh Suicides" by **Nora Gold** at *Haaretz.com*.

"I don't like the whole icon idea; I think it just reduces people—flattens them. It's like, if you're a feminist, you're supposed to be some perfect embodiment of someone else's idea of what feminism is. Telling your truth: that's feminism."

Katha Pollitt, interviewed by **Wendy Smith** in "Taking Back the Power," Publishers Weekly, August 11, 2014.

A FEMALE FIRST

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, installed as the president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in October, is the first woman, and the first gay rabbi, to lead a Jewish congregational organization. "We recognize that there are many entryways into Jewish identity beyond religion," she said in her inauguration address, emphasizing the inclusivity of the Reconstructionist movement, the smallest of the major streams of Judaism with about 100 congregations.

PHOTO OF DEBORAH WAXMAN: LAUREN PULVER, COURTESY OF CAMP JRF.

ONE JEWISH FAMILY

No Blessings, No Curses—Jill Soloway's "Transparent"

If you missed **Jill Soloway**'s dramedy series "Transparent," that's because it was never on TV. It's part of the wave of Internet programming outside primetime's mandate to connect with the widest audience and skirt controversy. Instead, this series on Amazon Prime is free to explore perspectives rarely seen in broadcast TV.

"Transparent" follows the Pfeffermans—three adult kids and their parents—through a host of personal transitions: divorce, abortion, death, and the gender transition of parent Maura (*née* Mort, played by Jeffrey Tambor). Maura's revelation, that she is a transgender woman, organizes the 10-episode arc. Commentary about the acclaimed show has largely explored the important and complex identity politics of representing trans people. But gender identity is not the only primetime-unfriendly theme here. Religion is baked into the world of the show, as is sexuality.

It wasn't the *heimish* and pitch-perfect dialogue, the exploration of Maura's identity, or the family dynamics that haunted me for days after watching this series straight through. It was the show's cosmology, where justice is not tied up with expressions of gender and sexuality.

We encounter eldest daughter Sarah (Amy Landecker), bored, in her bright and sprawling Los Angeles mini-mansion. She finds herself suddenly in lust and love with a former girlfriend—while married to the father of her small children. And she's honest about it, splitting up from her spouse rather than proceeding in secret. This is where, in broadcast TV, she would be punished. An invisible hand would push her back to her husband or force her to pay an ultimate price for prioritizing sex and intimacy. Instead, we see ramifications (so many ramifications!), but not punishment. We see fallout, but not retribution, a subtle, profound distinction. In "Transparent" land, there is no Fate nudging people to where we expect them; there's just the mess that comes from life's tough choices.

The same absence of cosmic intervention plays out in Maura's transition. She's warned by another trans woman that the price she'll pay for her transition is her family, a thought as heartbreaking as it is inconceivable at the start of the series, as we watch the Pfeffermans lovingly eat Chinese food, lovingly banter and sprawl in their childhood home.

While Maura endures terrifying ruptures in her life and familial relations in order to heal that deep rupture of a misconstrued gender, we see dominos falling, systems and results—not karma. She's not punished for choosing to embody her gender, but she does suffer. There is harsh fallout from making these choices in a transphobic world. Maura is not the perfect victim, and the character retains the depth and complication of a person scarred by a lifetime of staggering lies. Maura is both hero and villain of her own story.

"Transparent" also explores religion, a divisive and thus taboo topic on TV. The show weaves in questions about Jewish practice and identity rarely explored in pop culture. In a flashback, we meet thirteen-year-old Ali boycotting her Bat Mitzvah. She rails against her green taffeta dress until the conversation turns to God. "Honest," Ali asks Maura, "Do you actually believe in God?" The retort, classically: "That has nothing to do with your Bat Mitzvah."

But the conversation doesn't end there. Maura's expressions of doubt and struggle don't conflict with her Jewishness, exactly: unlike in the Christianity of American TV, faith isn't the kernel of her religious identity. And unlike on primetime, in the world of "Transparent," you can question the existence of God without a resolution. Complexities just sit there—ambiguous, thorny, and unresolved—like in real life.

On her would-be Bat Mitzvah day, Ali is home alone when a caterer arrives, uninformed of the cancelation. Out from her teenage monotone, Ali launches into a rousing show for the stranger, chanting Torah with interpretive dance and grand gesticulations. Her portion, *Lech Lecha*, suggests there's a price to pay for not going forth, for delaying or clinging too closely to one's old home for too long, but it recognizes that there's also a price to pay for leaving.

The Jewishness of "Transparent," swirled in with the queerness, contains traditionalism and atheism, boundary-crossing mixed with obligation, and the many layers that make up identity.

MELISSA TAPPER GOLDMAN

A FEMINIST IN ISRAELI POLITICS

"Did anyone ask Cinderella if she wanted to get married?"

Merav Michaeli, now a member of Knesset, from a 2012 TEDx talk. The video is re-circulating now as Israel's religiously-based laws of "personal status"—i.e., marriage and divorce—are increasingly seen as restrictive.

Gail Asper at the museum's launch.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Moving from "Bystander" to "Rescuer"

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights—with a focus on Jews, on women, on hunger and trafficking, on oppressed minorities around the world—is Canada's first national museum outside of Ottawa, the country's capital. It opened in September in the Canadian prairie city of Winnipeg, thanks to energetic advocacy from **Gail Asper**, daughter of the late media mogul and philanthropist **Israel "Izzy" Asper**, who had dreamed it up. She managed to bring this dream to life despite skepticism from Canada's eastern establishment and vociferous opposition from non-Jewish groups who felt their own struggles would be insufficiently represented.

Note the preposition in the museum's name. This place isn't just "of" human rights, examining past struggles, but has a mission to educate visitors *about* their rights—including the rights of all people to love, literacy and physical safety. Exhibitions make strong points about women's suffrage, freedom from fear of rape and of violence at home, children's right to schooling, racial and marriage equality and the history of marginalized ethnic groups in Canada, including the aboriginal people known as "First Nations."

For marshalling bipartisan political support for the museum's role and raising the millions needed for its planning and construction, Gail Asper has been awarded the Order of Canada, a signal honor, and wears its signature small pin every day, along with two different pins created to celebrate the museum. "I'd like to be able to wear my own brooches one day," she joked in a recent conversation. "I haven't had a free lapel in 9 years."

On the day it first opened to the public, Asper set down her bright yellow knapsack for a conversation on a sunny bench outside the museum. The formal opening a couple of days earlier had some of its speeches—including her own, which she delivered (customary in Canada now) in both French and English—nearly drowned out by First Nations and anti-abortion-rights protesters. Though the museum was ringed with police, no one discouraged or shushed these shouts. "People who feel their rights are being violated can become bullies," said Asper.

Asper is no stranger to facing bias herself. When the Museum was under construction, signs were defaced with language like "Die Jew," she said. "The police were notified, and the incident was never repeated." The museum's non-Jewish supporters also got hate mail, with threats "that were horrible, threats with graphic, gross images. But it shows we have work to do.

"There are four participants in a human rights violation. There's the perpetrator, the victim, the bystander and the rescuer. Our job at the museum is to convert bystanders to rescuers."

Asper predicts a crucial role educating teenagers. "Adolescents are at a terribly important moment. In grade nine I stood by while someone was being bullied. The victim tried to laugh it off, and I could see what was going on, but I did nothing. I was in a position of power and I didn't take action. I still think about this.

"You have to exercise your muscles as a human rights defender. Someone who at age 15 comes through the museum will be a future CEO or teacher or general in the army. You have to get into shape to stand up. To help teenagers, teachers across the country are getting human rights tool kits, like at Yad Vashem," the world center for Holocaust research and remembrance in Jerusalem.

Paramount for Asper is this educational vision for the museum, and its chorus of first-person voices in the interactive multimedia exhibitions provide wide-ranging testimony, sometimes shocking. She uses herself as an example of how shielded many of us are. "I didn't know about the Acadian Expulsion. I had never been taught it," she said, referring to the people who were forced out of Nova Scotia and shipped to England, France and the Thirteen Colonies in the mid-eighteenth century.

"I didn't know about **Nellie McClung**," an early twentieth-century suffragist and activist for women's labor rights, "and she was from Winnipeg! Women were 'persons' regarding their responsibilities, but not with regard to rights. I was in my late 20s, and a lawyer, and I did not know any of this. I am annoyed when female politicians say 'I'm not a feminist'. It's time for people to realize how much of a struggle this has been."

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

The Courtship of the Known Donor

With Borrowed Sperm, Creating a Modern Family

by ILANA KRAMER

In the dining room of my family's home, my fiancee's fingers interwoven with mine, my mother across from us was ablaze with wild ideas as she announced, "You both should use Ilana's college boyfriend as a sperm donor! He has a great hair color and I always loved his mother!" She had our best interests at heart, so we laughed, but as my partner keenly pointed out later, "Can you imagine her suggestion of an ex's genes if I were a man?"

Two years later, now married to my wife and visibly pregnant, I realized that this incident was a prophecy into the sea of questions that threatened to knock us over if we weren't continuously grounded and ready for prying strangers' probing. We had decided to create our family with a known donor. He and his wife—close friends of mine for more than a decade—had volunteered to help us start our family, and we were immensely grateful to them both. After two cycles, each time using an oral syringe and a jar with the coveted ingredient, I got pregnant.

We felt our great good fortune in having these loving and generous friends, but the questions we were asked when we moved out of that first circle of closeness—whether making small talk at a party, or while seeing medical providers—sometimes felt like an affront to our intelligence, our values, and our privacy. People were curious, and they didn't hold back. Will he act as your child's father? (No.) *What will your child call him? ("Uncle," which is what our child would call him even if he weren't the donor.) What if the donor changes his mind and wants more involvement? (We will take the legal steps to protect our family, with the donor signing away paternity rights immediately after the birth and my wife officially adopting our child.)*

Our private, celebrated decision felt like it needed constant public defending. Those questions made me feel more like an irresponsible teenager than an adult beginning to create a family with her spouse.

But whether we liked it or not, the known donor route included more explaining. Well-intentioned others saw this as the dodgier, road-less-traveled option. The safer, more typical route, in their minds, included a distant, anonymous donor from a sperm bank. We had many friends who had already travelled this path, but fewer examples of families with known donors. We read books, we wrote to a queer parent listserv, we spoke to parents with older children and known donors. We talked and dreamed, both to each other and with our donor and his wife, who were themselves trying to conceive by more traditional means. We found answers that didn't guarantee certainty, but did reflect our values.

Over time, I think we became more comfortable with—and even welcomed—the curious questions; they gave us an opportunity to clarify exactly why we believed in our decision. I also believe there was a *Jewish* aspect behind my reason for choosing a known donor. I was comfortable with an overabundance of opinions, emotions, and dishes on the table. Similarly, it felt more comfortable for us to grapple with the complexities of too much rather than too little information about our child's origin. It wasn't that we were strictly apposed to the idea of an anonymous donor, but rather that we had wonderful men in our community, men who were going to have close and even avuncular relationships with our future children anyway.

After I wrote a "Modern Love" column about our family in The New York Times in October, close friends and even strangers reached out with their own experiences. Each family had arrived at their decision for infinitely different reasons. Each family held its own blueprint for building a foundation they believed in. Here, I have dropped the tidy categories of "known" vs. "unknown" donors for the far more complex and varied journeys of everything in the middle and outside of that. Here are the stories of five families. (Interestingly, the four women do not want their identities revealed, but the gay male couple, both male sperm donors, speak as themselves.)

Sara Herman* is married to a woman, and both are Jewish professionals, closely involved in the Jewish community in the New York area

Before my wife and I had even decided whether we wanted a known or an unknown donor, two different friends offered to be donors. One made it clear that his parent wanted a grandchild. And that was *not* what we wanted. Our parents would be the grandparents! We knew we could find a donor we knew, but we didn't want anyone else involved in parenting and we didn't want to complicate a friendship.

With time, we realized that what made the most sense for us was an anonymous donor. We liked being sure that there was nobody else involved in an emotional way with our child; It seemed clearer and simpler. We were trying to keep things as uncomplicated as possible. The pregnancy process is complicated enough for a same-sex couple, and we didn't want that extra layer of having to consider a third person.

We know a lot of people who took a really long time choosing their anonymous donor, meticulously looking through files. We didn't. We sat down with a bottle of wine and narrowed it down. I think you can make yourself crazy with the choosing of your donor, and we decided we're not going to do that. Most of all, we wanted the healthiest person we could find.

We specifically didn't want a Jewish donor because we don't believe the donor needs to be Jewish for our son to be Jewish. And if the Ashkenazi list of genetic disorders is really scary, why would we choose a Jewish donor when that's not how we define what makes our son Jewish anyway? We first narrowed down

*pseudonym

donors by physical traits, then health histories; we wanted the healthiest person. Finally, the staff notes had interesting things to say to about our donor's personality; our donor is a doctor, and he saw donating as a way to give back. In Judaism, the highest level of tzedekah is to give to someone anonymously and have that person receive anonymously. That's how we're planning to talk about the donor to our now-toddler son.

Rachel Kornfeld* lives on the East Coast with her partner; both work in nonprofits.

We'd said that if we were choosing to adopt, we would do an open adoption, so shouldn't we come from the same approach if we use a donor? My partner and I have two children from the same known donor. We were trying to get rid of the mystery as much as possible. There is some fear about children not having a dad, and choosing a known donor for us was taking away the mystery and power of an unknown "father." To me, the unknown part was very uncomfortable. A lot of the unknown donors were young and you were getting into a situation where years down the line, they may have changed as people, and I wanted to protect my child from that. Using a known donor, it's dealing with the intricacies right away.

I also had some fears about the fertility industry, with too many people using the same donor. I had read this report about half of the bar mitzvah class in a San Francisco neighborhood coming from the same donor.

It was appealing to us to use a Jewish donor. We are both Jewish, and though we aren't religiously observant we both strongly identify as Jewish, especially culturally. In the end, the man we had as our donor was part-Jewish, and we were fine with that.

The questions we were asked when we moved out of that first circle of closeness—whether making small talk at a party, or while seeing medical providers—sometimes felt like an affront to our intelligence, our values, and our privacy.

Once we decided on the known-donor route, we sent an email out to all of our friends soon after we were married, saying we wanted to find a donor, and from that process a couple of candidates surfaced. One interviewed us on our positions on Israel, and said he didn't want to work with a lesbian couple who wasn't as Zionist as he is, and the second was really clear that his mother wanted "Bubbe privileges." Another potential donor friend said he feared he wouldn't be able to separate from being a dad. Finally, through friends, a gay man was introduced to us for the purpose of being donor, and we got to know him over time as we went through a long process of figuring out his relationship to our child.

Ultimately, we don't know what the long-term in terms of how our kids will feel about having a known donor or how our donor will feel about his role in our kids' lives, and we had to make some peace with the uncertainties of the future.

Yael Posner* is a psychotherapist living in Brooklyn, and her female partner is a graduate student. They define themselves as a queer couple.

Originally the idea about using a known sperm donor came from the adoption studies I'd read. My understanding was that there was some emotional baggage with not knowing to whom you were biologically connected. I had some anxiety about what that could mean for my child. If we couldn't think of someone we felt good about, we would've gone with an unknown donor, but we found a very good friend of my partner's—a college pal she reconnected with a couple of years before he became our donor. He was really clear on boundaries, and, queer himself, he was excited about helping a queer family, which felt good to us.

We talked a lot about what his role would be—not as a parent but as a close friend of ours. We talked about if we had a bris for our child would that be okay with him. We discussed how, as the donor, not the father, he would respond to questions like "Are you the dad?" Since he lives on the West Coast, that geographical barrier was helpful. We agreed that he'd be in the narrative from the beginning, and that once our child became old enough to make a decision to have more connection, we'd all navigate that when the time came.

When our daughter was born, he waited for us to contact him. If there's something complicated going on in his reaction, we trusted that he would handle it elsewhere. We know that he has a lot of support from others if he needs it, though when he told his own family about his at-a-distance role, they didn't quite get it. At one point his father referred to our child as his granddaughter, but our donor said, "It's *not* your grandchild." (And it was helpful that they already had other grandchildren.)

Our donor is not Jewish. It was always clear we would raise our child Jewish. Even under *halakha* (and I don't agree with that) the child would still be considered Jewish because I am, and we are raising her in a Jewish home. I'm quite connected to the religious traditions, growing up in an egalitarian Conservative congregation. Our daughter's baby-naming will be at my childhood shul. My connection to family and extended family feels

*pseudonym

linked to my Jewish identity, and this is part of why I wanted our donor to be a person who was known to us.

Lori Lutterman is a writer and editor who lives in California with her wife and their two sons, 10 and 13.

Our donor is a Jewish man who's a good friend of ours. I went to college with him and his wife, and his being our known donor was something we used to talk about even during college, sort of jokingly. They live across the country and have two sons who are older and a daughter who's the same age as our youngest.

At the time we were trying to conceive, sperm banks collected from known donors very little information—information like (family history, medical background, pictures. To us, it felt like, "What a weird thing to have a kid with somebody whose face you haven't even seen. Even a straight woman having a one-night stand would know more." Our youngest son has a strong physical resemblance to the donor's family, and there are a lot of little quirks he has in common with them; I appreciate knowing where they come from. To us, it felt important for us to know that if our kid had a question, that he could have answer. And if our kid felt some sort of pull to know the donor, the donor was available.

And from what I understood, the number of Jewish unknown donors was kind of small. To us, it felt important to have a Jewish donor. If we had chosen a non-Jewish donor, it felt like there was a possibility of our kid saying, "Well, I'm not really Jewish," and I didn't want that escape hatch. Ironically, my 13-year-old is in a Jewish day school now and is very skeptical of the whole religious program, so I'm glad for our decision.

Today our kids are completely incurious about the donor. At one point, our younger son even called him "my organ donor." But our donor and his wife have a sense of relationship with our kids. Last year was our older son's bar mitzvah. They came out to California for it, and they presented him with a tallis, and his donor spoke at the ceremony. Also, we don't use the word "donor." We just talk about him by name. We certainly never used the D-word (for Dad). It wouldn't be an accurate description of him. We think of him and his family as our friends. A few years ago, my older son came home from Jewish summer camp one day saying that he and another kid and the bus driver were all talking about donors. The other kid said "My dad is in jail." And followed with, "Well, he could be. We don't know where he is." My son knows where his donor is.

What about the sperm donors themselves? Josh Cohen and his husband Scott Ballum Cohen, both in their mid-30s, have each been donors for different couples they know. They're now expecting their own daughter, conceived with a surrogate, whom they also know.

Scott: For both of us, we'd rather have more loving figures than not enough in our child's life; that's a big piece of it. I see this attribute in my husband and his friends, and it's so much easier to come into these Jewish dynamics than the ones I came from, in the Catholic religion, growing up. As husbands, we felt very committed in the long haul to each other, in context of a loving community. When I learned of a same-sex female couple in that community looking for help, it really didn't seem like a hard decision at all. There was something so powerful about our surrogate—my cousin's wife—coming to us to volunteer to carry our child that I jumped at the chance to offer that feeling to someone else.

At the same time, we started trying to have a child with our surrogate, as well as be a known donor to our friends. We are all now respectively expecting daughters, 6 weeks apart!

Josh: In my experience as a known donor, I've been trying for the past few years to help close friends of mine, a same-sex female couple, conceive. They approached me a long time ago about wanting to start a family. I had always wanted to create a biological child. In my own life, I have two loving parents who used an anonymous donor to conceive me, but there's a lingering question about who my biological father is. Because of this, separate from already having a supportive dad who raised me, I have been interested in playing that role as a known biological father. My brother had a different donor, and he's never been interested in knowing his biological father.

Initially, I was conflicted that the women who were using my sperm would be raising the child Christian, since they're both Christian ministers. I worried I wouldn't be able to relate to the child. It wasn't logical, more of an emotional fear that this child would grow up deeply believing in Jesus, and we would have that disconnect later on.

When Scott and I began to talk about having a family, we quickly realized adoption and gestational surrogacy were prohibitively expensive. There was no way we could afford it. We can't do these things ourselves; we need our community, and that includes having a baby, and that's also why we are ready to help others make families.

Scott: At one point, we talked to a friend about being a surrogate. In addition to being an affordable option, we liked the idea of having very close women in our baby's life. We wanted it to be very meaningful, personal and connected. We bought land in the Hudson Valley to build our future home, and it's people we know, friends and family, who have been helping us begin the building process. The same idea applies to creating a family. We wanted to try to do this with people we know and love and who love us. Our surrogate, who would have been an aunt to our child anyway, will now be "Amazing Aunt Sarah" instead of regular Aunt Sarah.

Josh: We told both of our parents we're expecting a child the day after our wedding. It was just the four over pizza after they helped clean our house all afternoon, and we decided to share the great news.

Scott: I didn't tell my parents that I was a donor until a month ago. They were just sort of amazed. Their response was "You live in a world that's so different from the one we grew up in." ■

Ilana Kramer lives in Northern California with her family and is at work on her first novel.

Acharai! [Follow Me!]

A MOTHER'S DAY IN THE ISRAELI ARMY

by JUDY LABENSOHN

When my daughter Yael was 17, I checked out her army just as I had checked out nursery schools, junior highs and high schools. Like all secular Jewish Israeli girls, at 18 she would be drafted into the Israel Defense Forces for 22 months.

To check out conditions in the IDF, I pretended I was writing an article. This was not far-fetched, as I often wrote features for The Jerusalem Post, and in the 1980's I wrote a humorous mothering column until nothing about mothering seemed funny anymore. The Army Spokesman's Office gave me permission to accompany a group of new recruits on their first day.

Cloudy sky, December 31, 1996. By 7:25 a.m., 150 families have arrived: mothers wearing oversized sunglasses; fathers with paunches; hungry boyfriends; concerned aunts; weary grandmothers; younger brothers and sisters wishing they could go to the army instead of school. The 18-year-old draftees wear the standard civilian uniform: blue jeans and knit tops. One member of each family unit lugs an enormous backpack, stuffed with everything the new recruit will need for the next 22 months, even though she will probably return home for the first Sabbath after induction. Fathers film as 150 Israeli childhoods end in a parking lot.

A heavy soldier stands near a little wooden table and uses a megaphone to order all new recruits to stand in line with their induction papers and Israeli identity cards. Young women look pleadingly at their mothers, reminiscent of first days at any nursery school.

"Mia, Adi, Moran, Ruthi, Svetlana, [the names go on]—get on the bus. Good luck to all of you."

Middle-aged parents who fought in the Six-Day War or missed that but made the War of Attrition, or missed that but made the Yom Kippur War, or missed that but remember the Lebanon War, surround the bus. Grandparents, who fought the British and then five or six invading Arab armies in 1948, rub their eyes.

From my vantage point on the bus, it is clear that these families are falling apart. Mothers and fathers—intimate enemies—will now be alone, together. How many couples will stay married?

He calls more names: "Gila, Galia, Merav, Avishag, Keren...." They climb on the bus.

The driver aims the bus towards the absorption base, an hour's drive from Jerusalem. Tissues replace cigarettes.

"That was hard," says Sigalit, the girl sitting next to me.

The bus enters Tel Hashomer where we are greeted by a billboard: THE STAFF OF THE ABSORPTION AND CLASSIFICATION BASE WELCOMES YOU ON YOUR INDUCTION TO THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES.

In June, 1967, when I was 21, I watched the IDF victory on TV from Cleveland, Ohio. I saw the dust, smiles and tears, heard the speeches, threats and songs, and I wanted to be a part of that. By September when I sat with an IDF representative in Jerusalem, I was 22. The army didn't want me; I was too old. The billboard at the entrance to the absorption base reminds me of my disappointment.

A blond male sergeant gets on the bus.

"Sit properly and be quiet. When I call out your name, say Yes." He begins:

"Oshrat."

"Yes."

"Roni."

"Yes."

"Rotem."

"Yes."

The new recruits giggle.

"No laughing. This is the army!"

He finishes the list of names, and then, with his whole being, shouts the most famous word in the Israeli army: *Acharai!* Follow me.

PHOTO: RACHEL PAPO

In their jeans and knit tops, the women march in two parallel lines to a low white building, where they are led into a pleasant auditorium. There, they are supposed to watch a movie that will prepare them for the 10-step bureaucratic maze they are about to enter, but the projector is out of order. Is this an omen, like a nursery school teacher's guitar popping three strings on the first day?

Their names are called again, and they are handed stickers with bar codes. These represent the new recruit's personal IDF identity number. At each station of the bureaucratic Via Dolorosa behind the closed double doors, the new recruit will hand over one bar code sticker.

Ready? Jump.

Station 1: Each draftee gives the details of her bank account. The army will automatically transfer a monthly sum to each account, enough for gum, soft drinks and cigarettes.

Station 2: Each new recruit receives the first payment—NIS 100 ($25) as a loan from the Israel Defense Forces, to be paid back in five monthly installments. The recruits are handed a 20-unit telephone card, a gift from the Soldier's Welfare Association.

Station 3: The girls are fitted with gas masks.

"A mask that fits you will be kept in a warehouse especially for your use, should the need arise," explains a female soldier. Each woman has her own gas mask in her closet at home, but should Israel be bombed with chemical weapons in the next 22 months, the girls may not be close to their closets. (Hopefully, the masks, unlike the projector, will be operative and the warehouse will be nearby and open.)

Station 4: Each woman dips one hand in ink so veteran soldiers can take her hand- and finger-prints.

Station 5: The draftee, in that fertile transitional state, neither here nor there, has her mug shot taken for the IDF identity card. The first 20 of the 50 new recruits from Jerusalem do not smile.

Station 6: The new recruit is interviewed for five minutes to verify her vital statistics—name, address, family constellation—and to determine who should inherit her IDF income, in case of death. This is the second time in 10 minutes that death is raised to consciousness, though in such a way that the horror of it is denied. Death, in the context of Station 6, is one option on the flow chart.

Station 7: Each recruit files into the clinic and extends both arms. She gets two shots, one in each. Some of the women cringe; others take shots like heroes. (This is also the venue for reporting allergies and pregnancies.)

Station 8: The recruit, presumably non-pregnant, receives a form that lists every item she will receive as soon as she walks over to the warehouse. The draftee signs the form and exits. She is still wearing jeans and a knit top. Even though all the paperwork has now been completed, making her legally a soldier, she does not yet look like one.

Station 9: She receives a clean, used, olive-green duffle bag. Inside is a uniform, which she tries on in the dressing room: a green Dacron shirt and slacks. They fit! She exits with her civilian uniform in the duffle bag. Now the fun begins.

Station 10: She stands in a circle with 49 other new recruits, all dressed alike. Their duffle bags sit on the ground in front of them, but these children are not going to play Duck Duck Goose. A redheaded male sergeant stands in the middle of the circle and says, almost kindly, "Welcome to the Israel Defense Forces."

During those days in May and June, 1967, before it was clear that Israel would continue to exist, I came to realize that Israel was worth fighting for. And if fighting for, then dying for. And if dying for, why not live there?

"Oshrat, Rakefet, Olga, Liat, Noa ..." The sergeant gives each girl her dog tag and IDF identity card with the photo taken minutes before at Station 5.

It is clear to any civilian onlooker pretending to be a journalist that these sundry 18-year-olds form a group. This particular group, though, has no identity. At least, not yet. They need a name.

In the Talmud it is written that all 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet were created on Friday afternoon, at dusk before the first Sabbath. Clearly, God's options were multiplied once She had letters to play with. It is no surprise, then, that the army of Her Chosen People recognizes the profound importance of names. The sergeant anoints the group Platoon G.

"We're going to basic training camp #12 in Tzrifin, a 30-minute drive from here. You will stay there for three weeks," a squad officer tells them once everyone is seated on another bus. This is the first time the girls have been told exactly where they will be going. Nobody giggles.

"I'm usually not even up at this hour," Ronit says, as the bus drives by the last orange groves east of Tel Aviv. Like the other girls on the bus, Ronit has been out of high school for six months, waiting for this day. Esther takes out her cell phone and calls home. When she finishes telling her mother where she is going, she looks sad.

Upon arrival, the squad officer orders the soldiers to take their bags from the belly of the bus, put them next to the wooden hut in front of them and arrange themselves in rows of five. When they are lined up, she reads their names: "Iris, Dana, Hili, Lital, Nechama...." The soldiers look as if they expect something meaningful to happen.

Meaning appears in the form of a short woman, no more than 19, with a long blonde braid down to her waist. She is their sergeant, and she stands before them as if a broomstick has been inserted into her backbone, reaching up to the rubber band holding her braid.

"Stand up. Hands at your side. Straighten the ranks," she bellows. "Those in the back rows, look at the girl's neck in front of you." The women obey and, miraculously, Platoon G looks like a military entity rather than a bunch of teenage girls waiting for boys.

"This is how you stand at attention," the sergeant pounds, "and this is at ease. Now do as I say: *Attention. At ease.*"

I have seen only one natural wonder of the world—Niagara Falls—but I am sure the others could not compare with the miracle I am witnessing here on a concrete field in the middle of Israel.

"This is how you turn to the right," the sergeant instructs. When some soldiers giggle, she shouts, "Quiet! This is the army!" She then teaches them how to march in place. "Left, right, left," she bellows, just like in the movies. "Now march and move forward at the same time."

Fifty women march across a field as a unit for the first time in their lives. They wear the uniform of the Israel Defense Forces. Drums should be rolling and

trumpets blaring, but the only sound is the cooing of pigeons in the eucalyptus trees. At this moment of creation, the group is differentiated from all other groups by being assigned a second name: Platoon G, Squad 1.

G-1 marches towards the dining room.

"Don't talk. Stand straight. Be proud," their sergeant shouts. "You must go to all three meals every day and sit at the table for at least 10 minutes. Sit together. Never be late."

I wonder why I never gave my children such clear messages. Coming from this 19-year-old, rules sound beyond argument.

"When you finish lunch, sit at the table with your hands behind your back. No one moves until 1335 hours. At 1345, we will meet in the open space and line up in rows of five." When the sergeant walks away to eat in the officers' dining room, the new recruits chortle.

The dining room is enormous. At the entrance is a sink for washing hands. Directly above it is a sign with the words of the prayer that Jews recite while washing hands before a meal with bread. Since observant Jews who serve in the army know the prayer from childhood, and since secular Jews don't pray, the sign is a puzzlement.

The women eat fried corn schnitzel, fried chicken schnitzel, elbow macaroni in oil, purple cabbage salad in mayonnaise, eggplant salad in oil, tehina, and sliced bread. Oranges for desert. Some of the soldiers sit like statues, staring at the full trays in front of them.

During the 10-minute break after the meal, the girls gather outside the dining hall and smoke.

"How's the army?" I ask.

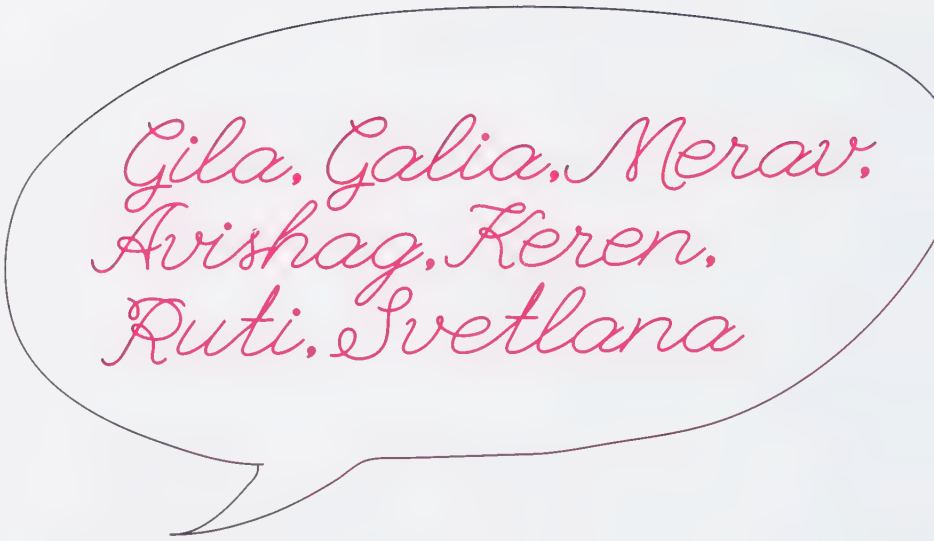
"Fun," says Michal. "Like our annual high school outing."

"My shots hurt," Adi complains.

"All my friends will be in discos tonight. . . " Ronit says, "and I have to be in this shitty place."

The recruits fall into formation and start marching. Past the dining room, the orange public telephones, the red Coke machines….

"Undo your ponytails," the sergeant bellows. "When you sit at the desk inside, pull all your hair over your face and bend your neck towards the table so the soldier can check your head for lice. When you're finished, put your hair back in a ponytail at the height of your ears and line up in fives."



When my daughter Yael was two and I put her over my knees to inspect for lice, I turned the inspection into a game. I called each louse "Shlomo", the Hebrew name of King Solomon. We were fishing for Shlomos. How many Shlomos found Yael's hair so beautiful they could not live without it?

"Now we march to your rooms," says the sergeant. The soldiers arrange themselves in rows as if they have been doing this for months. They march to what is called "the Hilton," a four story prefab cross between low-income housing and a youth hostel.

"Take all your stuff to your rooms. The third floor is yours. Put all your things *under* the bed. Then sit *on* the bed. Don't talk. Don't move."

The soldiers lug their belongings up 35 stairs to their new homes. Each room has two rows of seven iron beds facing each other. Yellow paint on the walls is peeling and the wooden bookshelf is empty. Fourteen windows—seven on each side—allow in natural light and air. On each bed is a gray blanket and on the blanket are a canteen, a belt, and a long, black instrument for cleaning rifles. Next to it are a soap dish full of more implements for the same purpose, ammunition, a green army jacket, a green wool sweater, a green canvas visor hat, and two folded gray blankets. White powder covers the blankets and clothes. After the recruits put their belongings under their beds, they sit on the beds. Then they talk and move.

"Quiet," shouts the sergeant. "I said don't talk and don't move." The soldiers move into obeying. "The white powder is against scabies worms, which cause unpleasant itching. The powder is used at the end of each basic training course. There are no worms now, but you must air out your blankets every day."

I was the kind of mother who skipped those chapters in how-to-parent books about setting limits and making rules. For me, boundaries are lines discussed by Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams, not mothers and daughters. Consequently, Yael, like me, has no schedule and little routine. Her obligations at home are minimal, due to laissez-faire mothering. I do not admit this with pride. In these barracks I appreciate the consequences of such laxity—scabies worms.

The soldiers are told to report to the Absorption Room at 1530 hours. Once there, they look tired and fed-up. They sit on low benches with no backs. Above the doorway is a sign: "And God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and take care of it." Next to it is graffiti: "This is a horrible, depressing place."

Yawns replace giggles.

"Hands behind your backs. Sit up straight. Head forward. Don't move at all. This is how you will receive the platoon's commissioned officer. Soon she will enter the room."

The Midrash says that if the Messiah should arrive when you are planting a tree, you must continue to plant. If a commissioned officer walks into a room, however, you must freeze into a posture of submissive respect.

Now the sergeant is introducing a new vocabulary which the soldiers pick up quickly: "Yes, officer," and "No, officer."

"Say, 'Yes, Officer'."

"Yes, Officer."

"Now, say 'No, Officer'."

"No, Officer."

"You will have a course on weapons, first aid, and chemical warfare. Now prepare to meet the platoon's commanding officer."

Drums roll in my head as through the door strides a thin girl, no taller than 5'2", wearing black-framed glasses and a visor that hides her face. Some of her hair is pulled into a ponytail; the rest straddles either side of her neck. She looks at the floor, then at the new recruits, as if she were wearing contacts for the first time. Her voice thunders with the authority of one who knows all the answers and is always right.

"There are two basic values here. Camaraderie and Discipline. Okay. I expect you to help each other. And I expect you to behave. We do not want to punish you, so do not provoke us. Okay. Platoon G-1 will do everything correctly and obey all orders. Okay. You are one body and you are the best. You will all cooperate. Okay. This doesn't have to be difficult."

The commissioned officer paces back and forth in front of the stunned women. On each "Okay" she looks at her soldiers from under the visor and behind the glasses. Her "Okay" is not like that of an insecure mother who, after suggesting to her daughter that she go to bed, adds an "Okay?" as in *Are we going to cooperate tonight? Will I still be an okay mother if I force you to go to bed?* No. The commissioned officer's *"Okay" says, This is the way it is. No questions. Period.*

The new recruits look comatose.

"On Friday you have a military trek and then you will stay here this Sabbath. Okay."

The commissioned officer escapes before the tears start rolling. The draftees expected to spend their first Sabbath at home. One soldier is crying loudly.

The crying turns into sobs. The sergeant orders the woman next to the distraught soldier to take her out of the room.

"Get her some water at the drinking fountain down the hall," she says. When they return five minutes later, the sobbing girl's uniform is completely soaked.

Groups of five soldiers are called to the front desk, while the other 45 soldiers are expected to sit up straight on the wooden benches with no backs and keep quiet.

"Are you vegetarian, naturopath, kibbutznik, religious, or from a bereaved family?" each recruit is asked.

The new recruits waiting their turn murmur, much like the Israelites murmured against Moses. The sergeant singles out one woman for whispering to her neighbor and tells her to stand up straight with her hands behind her back for five minutes.

OSHRAT, RAKEFET, OLGA, LIAT, NOA, MORAN ADI.

I chose the nursery school with the teacher who could sing in six languages. Each week Etti taught the children about a different country on the twirling plastic globe. Yael sang in Chinese, Arabic, Dutch, Hebrew, English and Russian by the time she was three. Etti never told any child to stand up straight with her hands behind her back because she was whispering.

In first grade, the choice was between a school that worshipped computers and one that worshipped God. I chose the latter. Computer technology changes rapidly, becomes obsolete quickly. I wanted Yael to learn something lasting. The prayers had been around since the 10th century. For high school, I checked out two schools—one with classes of 40 that paid lip service to excellence and another with classes of 28 that paid lip service to socialism. Yael's education was a prolonged sensitivity training towards hypocrisy.

At 1630 hours the sergeant begins her opening speech as if the 50 soldiers have just arrived and have not been sitting on benches for more than two hours.

"My name is Inbal, but you address me as Sergeant. You treat me with respect. I am not your friend. Keep your hands at your side. Keep your duffle bags locked. If something of yours is lost, you will have a trial and have to pay."

I stop taking notes, and list only the headings: appearance regulations, guard duty regulations, daily schedule, channels of communication, prevention of fungus in canteens, soldiers' rights. At 1745 hours, the sergeant raises her voice. "I'm not finished yet, but it's time to eat."

Numb, I excuse myself. Might there be another army in the neighborhood I can visit? What will I tell Yael, who always took five months to adjust to a new school? She has no more desire to become a soldier than I do to send her.

On the bus on the way home, a female soldier sits next to me. She asks if I'm a journalist.

"No," I say. "Just a mother."

She takes out her cell phone, the antenna looped like an umbilical cord.

"I...have no control," I murmur, " . . . what happens to her."

She looks at me as if I am crazy and calls home. ■

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Note: This piece is adapted from a essay that originally appeared in the December 2013 issue of Brain, Child.

REAL ESTATE WASN'T GENTEEL FOR DAUGHTERS

by ALICE SPARBERG ALEXIOU

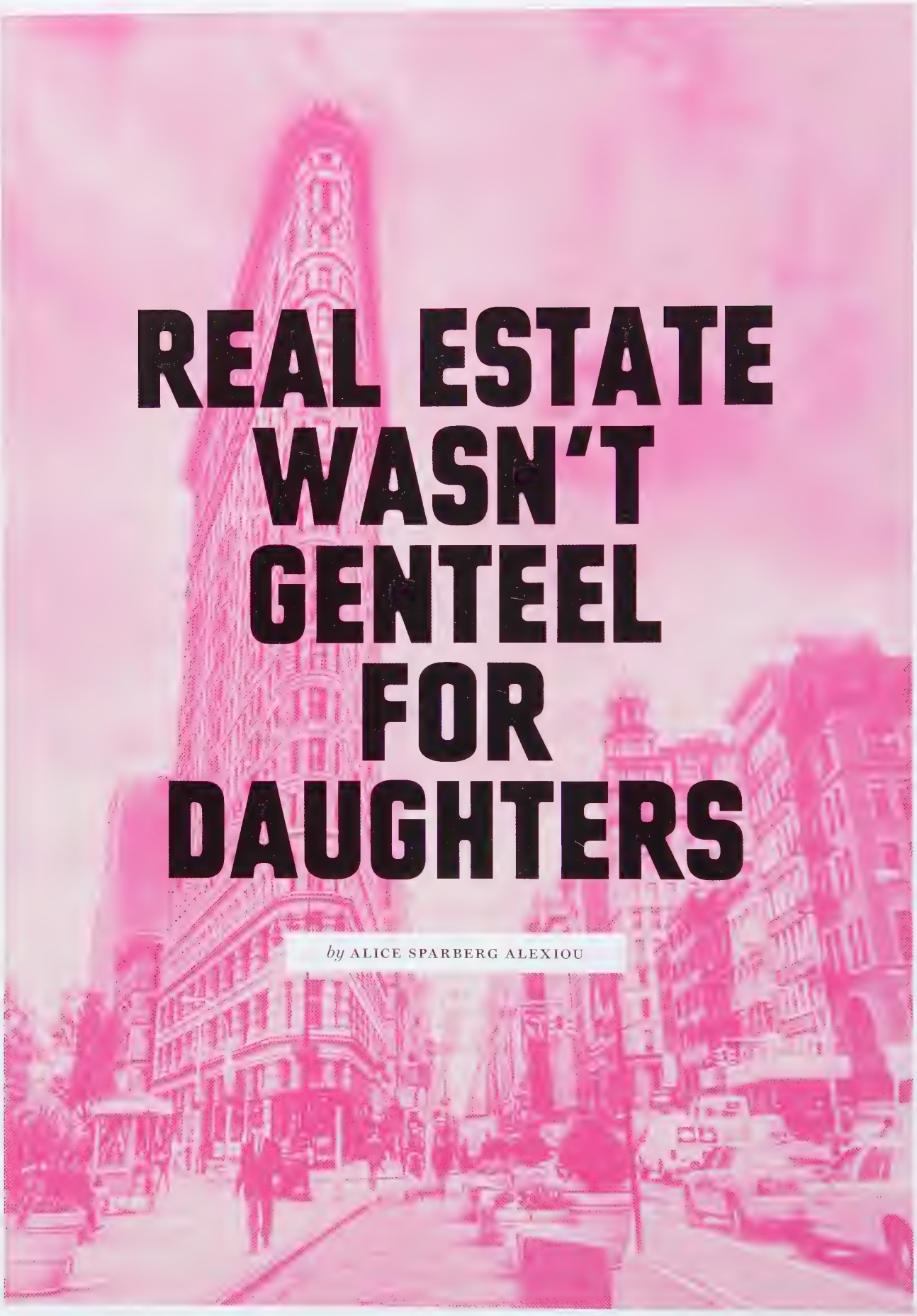


PHOTO: CHRIS BOJANOVICH

Daughters—and granddaughters—of Jewish real estate moguls are crashing through the steel ceiling. Are they bringing a female sensibility to this formerly male-only industry? And will our cities look different because of them?

I come from a family that has owned New York City real estate for three generations. Not a lot: we have shares in two Manhattan office buildings that were built in the early 20th century. (We also used to own one-quarter of the iconic Flatiron Building, which we sold in the 1990s.) Small potatoes, as my father used to say. Nothing compared to the mega-holdings of well-known real estate families like the Silversteins or Goodsteins or Roses.

Still, in 2014 New York, our properties are very valuable. My grandfather, Abraham Braun, a Hungarian immigrant who arrived in New York in 1914, acquired these buildings in the mid-1940s, along with three partners. Among them was a youngster named Harry Helmsley, who went on to become one of New York's great real estate moguls. Grandpa Abe, who read voraciously but couldn't write—probably he had never gone to school—died in 1947, of leukemia. He was only 51. My mother, his daughter, says that if he had lived longer, he would have become immensely wealthy, like other hard-driving Jewish immigrants who started out like him, one building at a time.

Abe had no sons and never talked about his business dealings to either of his two daughters. This despite the fact that he was a man ahead of his time: he sent both daughters away to college, and told them to study something "practical." Every woman, he said, should have a career. She should not depend just on her husband. Not the typical advice immigrant Jewish fathers were giving their daughters in the 1940s. (My mother listened, and became a chemistry professor.)

Yet there were limits to my grandfather's open-mindedness regarding women. Studying was one thing. It was genteel, *ladylike*. But real estate—and, by extension, money—was not. My mother and her sister never questioned this assumption. After their father's death they offered no input into overseeing the properties they inherited, assuming that my father, being male, would deal with this. And he did in part, although he had no say in how the properties were managed. That job was under the control of Harry Helmsley's company, Helmsley-Spear.

Fast-forward to the mid-1990s, when my husband and I discovered that the Helmsley employee acting as managing agent had for years been taking kickback from contractors working on our properties. Serious kickback. He had left a detailed and damning paper trail that we managed to acquire. My husband and I informed the other partners. Chaos ensued. We decided to oust Helmsley-Spear—namely Harry's notorious wife Leona (she who by then had served jail time and who, after her death, left twelve million dollars to her dog) and a squad of expensively clad men who worked for her. They refused to leave. Helmsley-Spear held all the bank accounts, and wouldn't give them up.

By default, responsibility for fixing this mess fell to me. Like me, the other partners in these buildings had inherited their shares in these properties. Most did not live in New York. Those who, like me, were local seemed to have no interest in getting their hands dirty stewarding these Manhattan real estate holdings.

I needed all the chutzpah I could muster to seize back and clean up what belonged to our family and its partners. But acting as an owner was a new concept for me. Just thinking about this now, some 20 years later, my heart beats fast. Acting aggressively in a commercial context was not what a good Jewish daughter was supposed to do.

My grandfather's message to his daughters had been passed down to me. Like my mother, I was educated in academic realms, not business; I taught Greek and Latin. My parents, modest and thoroughly decent people, deplored any show of wealth. At best, they felt ambivalent about having "property." There was something about the visibility of it that upset them. They were afraid that people would think of them as wealthy. Grandpa Abe Braun certainly hadn't felt that unease. My mother told me that he was *proud* of the buildings. As well he should have been.

Suddenly I knew that if I didn't fight for the buildings we'd inherited from Abe, we stood to lose them.

So I forged ahead. For four years, I did battle with Helmsley-Spear. Along the way I acquired an education quite different from my background in classics. Real estate, I learned, is a dirty business. People fight like dogs over every square inch. If you don't protect what is yours, watch out.

I also learned (why was I surprised?) that real estate is a men's game. (Leona Helmsley was an anomaly: she gained her power in the industry the old-fashioned way, by marrying the boss.) Women who got into the game were vilified. As I fought to take back my grandfather's property, I endured chronic insults from men who worked for Leona. One tried to placate me by inviting me out to lunch. "Are you fucking *kidding me*?" I replied. "Don't abuse me!" the man shouted. Soon I developed a justified reputation as a woman with a big mouth.

Finally, we ended up in court. A sweet victory was ours. The judge removed Helmsley-Spear as agent, and our properties emerged intact. I hired another management company, and I was made managing partner.

With a few exceptions—the most notable being Donald Trump—the big developers in New York City are, in the tradition of Grandpa Abe, Jews. This is also true in other major American cities. The foray of Jews into real estate began at the beginning of the last century, when they arrived here by the hundreds of thousands from Europe, where they were often prohibited from owning land. Not so in the Golden Land. Jewish immigrants and their sons—but not daughters—scraped together their pennies and closed deals on old, shabby buildings with a handshake.

That world has long ceased to exist. Today, as New York is rapidly becoming affordable only for the super-rich, a grimy

industrial loft in the Flatiron district—such as what my grandfather and his partners bought for *bubkes*—is now worth millions of dollars. With this lure, many owners are selling out to huge developers armed with mind-boggling quantities of capital, much of it coming from abroad. The old buildings are soon destroyed. In their place? Postmodern glass-clad skyscrapers rising to previously unthinkable heights. Tall "needle" buildings perched on small lots the size of my apartment's living room. All around them, you hear the clang-clang-clang of heavy construction machinery. In New York City, old buildings not officially designated "landmark" are in danger of disappearing.

Men—not women—are typically the ones building these out-of-scale skyscrapers, and real estate remains very much a man's game, even as the number of women in the industry has recently increased. In 2012 the New York Observer reported that 40 percent of real estate professionals around the country were women. By now the figure is higher. But these numbers count women working in real estate in any capacity. Almost no women acquire executive power in this business. The few women who do—in New York and also in other cities, like Washington D.C. and Chicago—are typically the daughters of big developers. (It seems my grandfather's dictum no longer applies.) Lisa Silverstein, 47, oversees the residential side of Silverstein Properties, developers of 1 World Trade Center. Amy Rose, 47, with her cousin Adam Rose, runs Rose Associates. Laurie Zucker, of the Zucker Organization, builds residential projects. Zucker, 58, estimates that there are perhaps 50 women in New York who are working in some capacity in their fathers' real estate companies. She herself studied piano at college, but since 1977 has been working with her father, Donald Zucker, 83. She says that she does a lot of the design work, which includes selecting the construction materials ("I love creating buildings"). She is also in charge of managing the properties. When her father retires, she is slated to head up the company. When she started doing this, she told me, "I was often the only woman in the room. It was difficult. A lot of people didn't take me seriously." Working in a family company did provide her with a precious perk other women find hard to come by: time flexibility when her children were young.

Today, Zucker's title is vice chairman. When asked when she will be the official CEO of her father's company, which manages approximately 2,500 apartments in the New York City area, and has built or restored 28 residential buildings in Manhattan, she answered: "I don't need the title CEO. I don't care about titles." Her only concern, she said, is to get the job done. Zucker partners on a lot of buildings with Shari Goodstein Rossi, whose father's company, the Goodstein Organization, has built 30 apartment buildings in New York, among them Battery Park City. Zucker and Goodstein Rossi have known each other all their lives; back in the 1940s, their grandfathers did deals together. Goodstein Rossi began working for her father, Steven Goodstein, when she was 18 and fresh out of high school in Great Neck. The first thing she did was to figure out that an employee was stealing from him. Today she oversees her family's financial portfolio. "I have to do real estate," she says. "I have no choice. It's your legacy, you have to protect it." Her father never gave her an actual title. Her job is always to "do what my father says," she tells me. Her relationship with him is "raw, but wonderful."

"He," Goodstein Rossi says, "is the patriarch."

What are the practical—as opposed to the emotional—impediments to women's advancement in this burgeoning and profitable industry? To develop property, you need a lot of capital. Women do not have the same access to capital as men do, so New York has few women developers who came into the business on their own. One of these is Susan Fine, whose father, a Boston real estate lawyer, owned some property there. As a developer or as project manager, she was behind the redevelopment of mixed-use space at the World Financial Center in Battery Park City and 20 years ago she conceived and implemented the entire $250 million redevelopment of Grand Central Terminal for the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

"My projects are small," she says. "If I were a guy I'd have 10 projects going. I do two at a time, on a certain scale. I don't compete with the big boys. And they are not interested in my projects."

Aha.

Fine invests her own money in these projects, along with other partners, and she made her money buying and selling buildings. "Life to me is all about Loehmann's," she said, referring to the now-defunct and much-beloved women's discount clothing retailer. "This is how you buy property: with bargains."

Fine remarks that real estate is one of the few businesses where you can go from zero to "a gazillon dollars" in one lifetime. But, she says, to make money, "you either have to cut costs or raise rents. Neither option is very appealing."

"Real estate has no rules, no ethics, no crimes and no punishments," Fine says. "The only motivation to do right by people is that [otherwise] they won't do a deal with you again." Still, for all its nastiness, Fine says she loves the real estate business—every part of it. ("I like the *cholent* analogy," she says, alluding to the Shabbos casserole that contains a variety of distinct ingredients.)

"I got into it because I believe that the physical

"If I were a guy I'd have 10 projects going. I do two at a time, on a certain scale. I don't compete with the big boys."

PHOTO OF SUSAN FINE: MICHAEL NAGLE, WWW.MICHAELNAGLE.COM

environment really changes people's lives," Fine says. "The intersection of physical design and policy fascinates me."

One of Fine's current projects is the development of Turnstyle, the shopping concourse inside New York's immense Columbus Circle subway station. This station is the seventh busiest in the system; nearly 23 million riders pass through it yearly. It is located right in the heart of things, next to Central Park, and surrounded by some of Manhattan's poshest commercial and residential buildings.

Brooklyn real estate is as hot as Manhattan's. In this once-depressed borough of New York City, another female developer, Abby Hamlin, principal of Hamlin Ventures, has built stunning multi-million-dollar townhouses. But across the street from these, she partnered with the nonprofit Common Ground on the award-winning Schermerhorn House, a striking glass-paned building which houses low-income people, especially those in the arts, as well as the formerly homeless.

So we have innovative women developers transforming interior underground space and creating affordable housing. Whereas the "big boys" are in a never-ending contest to build the highest skyscraper. But it is not just the men who love tall buildings, which are an essential part of New York's fabric. In 2013 Amy Rose told The Real Deal: "The thing I'm most proud of in my career is working on those ground-up development projects that shape the New York skyline."

In Proverbs 31, 16: we read of *Eishet Chayil*, the woman of valor. "She considers a field, and buys it. With the fruit of her hand, she plants a vineyard." It turns out that owning real estate, and reaping the benefits of it, were honorable Jewish women's activities even back then.

This is helpful for me, a Jewish woman, to remember. It implies that there is an ethical way for my partners and me to own and rent out our property. When people lease the places where they live, or places where they make their living, your property becomes their personal space. How you manage your property directly affects the quality of their lives. This is a grave responsibility.

But squeezing the maximum value out of a piece of real estate—for example whether raising rents or cutting expenses—by definition conflicts with tenants' interests.

Sometimes I ponder whether it is time to sell my grandfather's properties. They are filled with small businesses: dentists, clothing designers, travel agents, architects. The buildings throw off a lot of income, and are worth a lot of money. One of them, a beautiful old 16-story office building, sits on 57th Street--just east of One57, a new 75-story uber-luxury condo tower that epitomizes the current Gilded-Age mentality.

But on 57th Street, old buildings like ours are disappearing. The small retail spaces that they housed, which used to give the street its New York-esque flavor—Uncle Sam's umbrella emporium, where I remember going as a child, The Ritz, selling gently used fur coats, the ornately gorgeous Rizzoli's art book store—are gone. It is businesses like these, the urban thinker Jane Jacobs wrote 50-plus years ago, that fire a city's economic engine. Their presence, she said, make a city alive. Today, developers are destroying the buildings that house such businesses. In their place, they are putting up out-of-scale glass-paned skyscrapers like One57, that stick up above the Manhattan skyline like erect penises. The condos within are being snatched up by billionaire foreigners who use them as investments. They don't even live there. Fifty-Seventh Street is now referred to as "Billionaires' Row."

The developer of One57, Gary Barnett, an Orthodox Jew, is building skyscrapers all over Manhattan, including the glass-and-metal Nordstrom Tower, which will be topped with a spire and rise up 1,775 feet. Except for 1 World Trade Center, it will be the city's tallest building. So in the race between male developers to build Manhattan's tallest skyscraper, Barnett is competing not just with other men, but with himself. Nordstrom Tower, to use the language of the real estate media, will "dominate" Manhattan's skyline. Dominate, indeed: No other verb could so accurately convey the impact of Gary Barnett's skyscrapers on New York.

It is not just Barnett who is devouring 57th Street. On the other side of Grandpa Abe's building, another developer is putting up yet another glass-and-steel high rise. We are one of an ever-shrinking number of holdouts. Every so often, my husband and I get a call from Barnett, asking us if we want to sell our building. We keep telling him no. Once he told my husband that he just *couldn't* take no for an answer.

No doubt Barnett, if he got our building, would tear it down. Where, then, would all the small businesses that now occupy it relocate to, in a city where office rents keep rising?

We are not selling.

I have a photo portrait taken of my grandfather at my mother's wedding in 1944, two years before he died. He is wearing a dark suit and a fedora, and he is glowing with happiness. I wish I had known him. Every day, I look at his picture, and I wonder what he would think about his granddaughter as guardian over his properties. ■

Alice Sparberg Alexiou, a contributing editor at Lilith, is the author of The Flatiron: the New York Landmark and the Incomparable City That Arose With It, *and* Jane Jacobs: Urban Visionary. *She is currently working on a book about the Bowery.*

PHOTO: NEW YORK YIMBY

Sweet Charity

a short story by MICHELE MERENS

"Do you know Aimee Rothstein is dying?"

My heart flutters as if tickled. Or maybe it is only the lamb nuzzling my palm as it searches for food. "What?"

"Cancer," Penny says. "Bone cancer, they're thinking. How old do you figure she is, anyway? I'm guessing she's around our age."

Aimee Rothstein dying. The news can't be trusted. Does it fit with my impressions of Aimee, the few times I've met her before? No, the diagnosis is not in sync with my concept of any young mother. No we all look life in the eye, unblinking, while dressing our babies, feeding them, planning their next days and years.

The lamb gives up and returns to its own mother, a sloe-eyed ewe. Deprived of the comforting moistness of the animal's breath on my skin, I step away from the pen and search for the children. Penny's son is standing near a vending machine that will not give up its feed, while my daughter edges too close to a ram standing on the other side of the gate.

PHOTO: JOHNNY JET, WWW.FLICKR.COM/PHOTOS/JOHNNYJET/

"Shoshie, move away!" I cry, throwing up my hands to ward off an assault. It's a futile gesture, but I get my daughter's attention.

My glance lingers until Shoshanna steps back. Only then do I call out to Penny, "How do you know?"

"Her husband phoned school the other day to talk with the principal. I took the call," she fires back. As she rummages in her purse to find more quarters for the feeder, she adds, "He started weeping, Sarah. Then he told me the whole story. It's so sad."

"You shouldn't gossip," I scold. "I don't know Aimee well enough to hear this news."

Penny's eyes go wide. "I just assumed Shoshie and her daughter were in the same kindergarten class."

"It's a big school," I remind her. "And no, we hardly know them at all."

It is startling to see Aimee Rothstein in the park a week later, as I guess I'd expected illness to hide her away. Yet here she is, looking much the same as ever as she sits on a bench in a red cape, the hood falling in scalloped folds across both shoulders. An elderly woman wearing a gray woolen coat tries to cope with Aimee's daughter on the swings nearby.

I briefly hope Penny has exaggerated Aimee's story. Since hearing the news, I have found myself imagining the horror of calculating days leading to death in the same way most people count down to birthdays. And then my thoughts always veer off onto one shameful, unutterable truth, *Thank God it's not me.*

I notice Aimee's child is acting particularly rotten to the elderly woman. With each swing, she kicks at pebbles under her feet and throws dust. Yet imagine what the child's going through daily, and forgive, I remind myself. A wind comes up, clanging a red sign tacked to the fence that lists SAFETY RULES. Useful warnings if you know how to read. But what about my own daughter Shoshie, struggling with her phonics? And what about this Rothstein girl? Aimee's daughter had to constantly hear adults whispering about, in slightly hysterical tones. All these strange words had to be knocking like wind chimes over her head: malignancy, terminal, radiation. No child could begin to guess why such fierce winds were blowing, or from which direction.

Shoshie had abandoned me at least fifteen minutes ago for her friends at the Tower, but now I need her.

"Shoshie?" When I crook my finger, my daughter pivots from the Tower's second level to the ground, and reluctantly comes over.

"Isn't that girl in your class?"

Shoshie eyes her then declares, "No."

"But she's in kindergarten too, right?"

Shoshie shrugs, begins to rub at her nose.

"Don't pick," I say. "Here." I retrieve a crumpled tissue from my coat pocket and hand it to her. Then I add, "She must be in the afternoon class," I say. "You should invite her to play fort. C'mon."

As we walk over, Aimee Rothstein glances at me in a curious way.

"Hi. I think our girls might know each other from school."

"Your daughter is in Mrs. Harrison's class?" Aimee asks.

"No," I say. "She goes in the morning. But we've seen you around, maybe at the library reading program? Anyway, my daughter wanted to come over and say hi. Shoshie." I squint up my eyes to prompt. "Can you say hi to—?"

"Emma," Aimee offers. "That's her Grandma Lyla with her."

"Emma, of course," I say, nodding to Lyla at the same time. "Do you want to play with Shoshie and her friends, Emma? They're building a fort by the Tower."

Emma's ready to accept my invitation. She shoves off the swing, then moves a few steps away from her grandmother's oversized shadow in the dirt. With Aimee's nod, our children run to the Tower together. I smile too then ask, "Does your daughter take a dance class at the Academy?"

"She has."

"That's where I've seen you before," I lie. "Well, it's great to meet you. Maybe they'll be in dance together next term."

Aimee tucks one lip under the other, doesn't respond.

"You know," I continue, as casually as if I'd just come up with the idea. "Why don't our girls get to know each other before the new season starts? How about a play date at my house? Your daughter's welcome any time."

Aimee doesn't reply, but her mouth goes small. I can guess what she's worried about, recompense, and so I say, "We'll just try it one time and see how it goes. You'd be helping me out. I don't think my daughter will know anyone else in dance next year."

Aimee's breath comes fast, and I wonder how much her illness has already advanced. Yet then she reaches for her purse and says, "It's a very nice offer. Let's exchange numbers."

When the bell rings, a barking Beardsley gets to the door first. He's followed by my daughter, dancing barefoot in her antici-

pation. Both have to wait for me to turn the lock and then Beardsley wedges his nose up onto the screen, terrifying Emma and Grandma Lyla.

"Down Beardsley," I scold. As I pull him back by the collar, I try to explain, "He's harmless, really, useless as a guard dog. He mostly patrols for squirrels."

Still, Grandma doesn't take her eyes off our St. Bernard as she steps into the hall with her charge. Emma looks as if she's confronted yet another wolf in this strange forest. I force a laugh to calm everyone down.

"Do you like costumes, Emma?" I ask as Shoshie pushes past me to smother her newfound friend in a hug. "Shoshie has plenty."

Emma nods and they head upstairs, ready for a session of make-believe to see if the friendship will prove real and true. I'm left behind with Grandma, who demands in the heavily accented words of someone whose first language is presumably not English, "What time you want me back?"

My glance falls to the car keys she's holding. Truthfully, I'm relieved not to have to play hostess, even if this nervous visitor deserves all my attention and concern. More than likely, this woman will be burying her own child soon; laying out clothes for her funeral much as she did when sending her off to school decades ago. That's her cursed fate and a reality so unbearable that, this close, I find myself full of irrational superstitions. No I'm not proud of these thoughts, but I'm normally lousy with the elderly and so terrified to invite into my home this sad-eyed woman who carries about her smells of old age and imminent tragedy.

"Let's say two o'clock?" I say. "That will give the children some time together."

"Two, yes."

Still eyeing the dog, Grandma Lyla backs down our bricked walkway. I latch the screen, release my hold on Beardsley. Upstairs, I can hear my daughter chattering, "You be the witch and I'll be the princess."

"You girls okay?"

In reply, I hear a clicking of play heels, then Shoshie's face appearing behind stair railings. Her red-brown hair is twisted in a messy bun and she is wearing her pink princess gown.

"We're good."

Imagine what the child's going through daily, and forgive, I remind myself.

"You let Emma wear whatever costume she wants, witch or princess," I instruct. " Now, are you girls hungry for a snack or do you want to wait?"

There is a rustle of netted skirts and then a blonde-haired witch comes alongside my daughter. Emma's chosen the darker costume, but I'm guessing she's the cherubic one when it comes to coloring and temperament. Still she seems so unsteady in her black sequined getup and inch-high play shoes, I warn, "No heels on the stairs, Emma. It's not safe."

Even as I say the words, practically trill them, the girl's lips start to scrunch up with worry she's done something wrong.

"Well, aren't you hungry?" I ask, making a joke. It works. Emma's face relaxes even if her tongue continues to poke about in her cheek.

"I had lunch," she informs me.

"Okay. I'll just make snacks. Go play."

The girls kalump-kalump back to Shoshie's room. When I leave the chilled hallway, Beardsley trots obediently behind. As I push open the door leading to the kitchen, I'm feeling proud and why not admit it, if only to myself? My offer to watch Emma has to be of real comfort to Aimee while she's struggling. In this house, we will nurture through normalcy, a routine playdate—and no hint of hushed conversations, tears being wiped on sleeves whenever a child enters a room. None of that for Emma today.

I open the refrigerator and retrieve a milk carton, give a brief sniff to make sure the milk is fresh. Yes, today, I'd done it right. I'd helped people and not in my usual ineffectual ways of being charitable, surrendering to phone solicitors or signing up for fundraisers that offered up hefty tax deductions as incentives.

I reach into the pantry and then rush a bit while I spread peanut butter and jelly onto crackers, not sure how long everyone's amiable moods will last. I pour milk into two Sippy cups and set them on the table.

"Girls, snacks!"

As I head upstairs, I notice Shoshie has closed her bedroom door against all intruders, mainly me. Behind the door, I can hear her cry out, "Scribble Scrabble!", and Emma's laughter in response, a sweet baa-baa riff.

"Girls, snacks," I repeat and push on the door. As I do, my glance shifts to the child-size mezuzah we'd hung on Shoshie's doorframe, a gift from her baby-naming, and again, I think a bit irrationally, yes see, Emma safe's here.

They are on Shoshie's bed. My daughter stands in full princess regalia, holding a marker in her left hand. Emma sits cross-legged near the pillow, markers held in both fists. Lines of blue, green and yellow trail out along the sheets. What they've drawn is not clear. But to me, the lines look like chalk marks used to sketch victims' bodies at crime scenes and so, of course, I scream.

Shoshi just glares, furious that I've walked in and ruined their fun. Emma, however, launches into a volley of tears and wails. Downstairs, Beardsley barks in nervous accompaniment.

"Emma, don't. It's okay," I mumble.

I close my eyes, scribble scrabble all those lines from sight. Remind myself about non-toxic markers, how they're made to erase with a sponge.

"All right. It's time for a snack. I think we need a break," I announce. Using the door knob for balance, I turn to leave. Behind me, I hear one last loud sniff from our guest and Shoshie's bell-toned reassurances. "It's okay. Don't cry."

She needs to cry, I think. Let her cry, Shoshie. The sheets are probably a total loss but all this is fixable. In her home, nothing is fixable anymore. So have pity.

I return to the kitchen and glance at the clock in an entirely different mood than moments ago. It's not even twelve-thirty. I have an hour and a half more to go on this play date. The girls trail in a

few minutes later, back in their clothes. I can tell Shoshie's already forgotten the incident upstairs, but Emma hesitates when she notices my gaze upon her.

"Here, Emma, sit," I say softly and pull out a chair at the table. The girl eyes the plate of crackers then pretends to be fascinated by the lamp hanging overhead. One, two, three, I watch her mouth as she counts the bulbs.

"Emma, is anything wrong?"

"I don't like peanut butter and jelly," Emma whispers to Shoshie, avoiding me altogether.

"I'm sorry," I say. "Is there anything else I can get you—?"

Beardsley has found his way under the table and my daughter pries open a cracker sandwich, offers it to him.

"Ahh, you're so gross!" she screams as the dog's tongue licks her palm.

For the first time since she's entered the kitchen, I hear Emma laugh, that baa-baa riff. I'm startled into action. Maybe this play date can be saved, after all.

I grab the dog's collar. Showtime, Beardsley.

"Do you want to pet him?" I offer. "He's really gentle."

It's not so much an invitation as a bribe and Emma squints, rightly suspecting my intentions. Still she rises from her chair and holds out her hand. I grab her palm, lay it on the brown furry tufts between his ears.

"This is his favorite spot," I confide. "But he can't get to it himself. He loves when someone helps."

Scritch, scritch. Emma's fingers start to move and Beardsley pants his appreciation. His jowls pool with saliva and then he can't help himself; he starts to drip.

Shoshie bursts out laughing. With a smile, I release the dog and pull a tissue from my jeans pocket.

"Let's make a potion," I say. "Dog drool's the first thing we'll need. Come here, sweetie."

I pivot the dog's massive jaw into my hand, and wipe. Startled, he backs off with a growl. Emma steps back and not willing to lose the moment to her fear, I retrieve another tissue, turn to my daughter.

"Blow."

Shoshie takes the tissue, snorts like an elephant at a watering hole.

"We'll grease down a bowl with dog's drool and kid's snot," I cackle in my best witch's imitation. I drop both tissues on the counter, rummage through cabinets. "And what else, what else?"

I open my refrigerator and see items I've let sit for days, even weeks, past their labeled expiration dates. A pint of grape tomatoes, paunchy in their skins, a browning head of lettuce. Two slightly cracked hard-boiled eggs, a quart of milk.

"Here. I've got smelly eggs, leaking tomatoes, rotting skull lettuce."

Both girls start to giggle, enchanted with my sorcerer's turn. Not even a costume nearby to help in the transformation, so they're impressed.

"And how about some nice, sour milk to blend it all together?"

"No! No milk!"

Upstairs, I can hear my daughter: "You be the witch and I'll be the princess."

I turn to see Emma's tongue working her cheek like a thermometer.

"My Grandma says sour milk makes you sick. If it's bad, throw it out!"

Sick, that word. How fast noises in the room fly away with that word.

Emma's eyes move frantically, to find Beardsley. But no longer the center of attention, he's left the room. It's Shoshie who comes over to dab with her finger at a few milk drops pitched into the table slats.

"How does milk get sour anyway?" my daughter asks.

"You don't know when it happens!" Emma shrieks before I can reply. She tries to control herself, as if someone has warned her not to behave this badly in someone else's home. Still her fingers clench, her cheeks purple in anger.

"You can't see anything! But it makes you real sick if you drink it. You could die!"

You could die. It is a phrase she understands beyond all other words that swirl lazy as dust motes in the air. She's found them in her mother's closets, under her bed.

Between lavender-scented sheets that, despite all their washings, can't hide the stink of illness.

I look at the milk already poured into pink plastic cups, focus on its whiteness in contrast, how pure, how clean. And I am surprised by this child's fierce insistence that the world only gives us something else: decay, decay.

"You're right, you wouldn't want to drink milk that's gone sour," I manage. "It doesn't taste good. But milk's not bad when it turns. It's just…different."

I take a glass from the cabinet and set it on the counter, start to pour until this new milk's almost rimming the top, threatening to spill. I pick it up carefully and move to the girls at the table.

"It's not sour. I was just playing before. Really, this milk is fresh from the refrigerator. You don't have to be afraid that it's going to change so fast you won't know."

Shoshie leans in, interested, but Emma's face doesn't give over a clue that she hears anything I'm saying.

"Come and taste it, you'll see."

My daughter inches forward, yet Emma's glances stubbornly sweep about, frantic to unearth landmines buried in this kitchen. Sour or not? Death or not? And what is there to trust, after all, when only the unknowable can be counted on in this room, in our words, in the very air?

"Come here, Emma," I repeat, my tone rock-steady. "Take a sip."

Her gaze shifts to mine, over the glass. When she blinks, an eyelash falls to her cheek. We are so close this is what I see, and I am nearly distracted.

But then I can feel her breath, wet, on my knuckles as her lips touch the rim. ■

Michele Merens is a Puffin Grant winner for her full-length play "The Lion's Den." She is also a member of the Dramatist's Guild.

ONE WOMAN'S RESUMÉ

by LEAH LAX

Objective: to be determined
(skills in order of acquisition)

1961: AGE FIVE

- Can tell time with my stomach.
- Can wake before Mama, Daddy, Amy, or Debbie, pad into the kitchen, and take a jar of Hellman's and package of bologna out of the icebox, then lift them above my head and set them on the counter next to a bag of Wonder Bread.
- Can push an orange dinette chair up to the formica counter, climb up, and lay out exactly enough cottony white squares for two sandwiches. Can take a real knife, spread the mayonnaise, and cut each sandwich on a diagonal.
- Can climb down to go coach toddler sister Amy on exactly how to climb out of her crib, patting her sturdy legs for encouragement.
- Can grunt and lift her over that last leap and not drop her or fall. Can lead her out of her room and direct her where to step so that neither of us cut our feet on glistening shards from the bottles she throws out of her crib, which she throws for the sheer joy of the crashing sound and the power of knowing she can make something escape her cage.• Can lead her down the hall between Mama's tall canvasses three deep against both walls, two small profiles making our way through a tilted world of blues and golds and slashing reds.
- Can glance without pausing, through an open door at Mama putting on her panties, her lean nude form bent double, a bouquet of shining black curls hanging in place of her face.
- Can eat our bologna sandwich breakfast and laugh together as morning light streams through yellowed crooked blinds over waist-high stacks of magazines, newspapers, and unopened mail, even when Mama appears in the doorway zipping a muumuu over her belly and soft round breasts.
- Can finish and trot right past Daddy sitting on the sofa reading his newspaper in yesterday's clothes, his hands gripping the paper as if it is his anchor against the tide, his silver hair on end, his mouth moving to words only he can hear.
- Can dress quickly in elastic waist shorts and sleeveless top, no shoes, and pull open the front door to Dallas' shimmering heat to join much bigger neighbor kids in daylong skateboarding, street ball, and secret clubs in cool dark garages. Can drink long draughts from the garden hose instead of lunch.
- Can return to Mama whining from her bed, climb back up on a kitchen chair before a forest of amber sleeves with the tops off, and sound out "Valium" and "Darvon," two of my first spelling words.

Can shake out exactly enough pills onto my open palm and bring them to Mama with a glass of water without spilling.

- Can leave her drifting, her TV flashing blue down the hall over her paintings and over me. Can let myself back in the house after dark for bologna sandwich dinner.
- Can fall asleep even though Daddy, stretched out on my bed, is singing in his tuneless voice: *Don't know why, there's no sun up in the sky. Stormy weather.*

AGE SIX THROUGH SIXTEEN:

- Can wrestle the boy next door inside a circle of cheering jeering kids and roll punching him in the grass.
- Can ride a bicycle without hands, even turning corners.

- Can pack my own lunch and get myself to school. Can absolutely never speak certain words at school: Daddy, mental hospital, Mama's pills.
- Can follow Mama to the galleries and museums she frequents and when she asks, "What do you see?" can respond with just the right prattle to keep her smiling brown eyes on me.
- Can read, in bed with a flashlight, books sister Debbie brings me from the public library. Can get a neighbor to teach me piano. Can teach myself to play a dull old cello from school and imagine myself a concert artist.
- Can ignore Debbie walking out the door to school, friends, clubs, dancing, anywhere but home, until one day she does not come back.
- Can examine my growing body in the mirror with a pained frown and fail to figure out what is so *different*.
- Can find twelve year-old sister Amy hunched on her rumpled bed holding a razor over her wrist and talk her down. Can fail to talk her out of accepting pills from the people who live next door where cars come and go, or from staying out all night with her nineteen year-old boyfriend she says she is going to marry.
- Can walk each day like an alien into the flirting teasing boy girl world of high school and still make 'A's.
- Can spend entire days mooning over a girl I crave to hold. Can wake in my childhood bed still flickering dreams of her to find my hand between my legs.

AGE SIXTEEN TO SEVENTEEN:

- Can decide I have a hungry soul and that there is a God, but what does that *mean*?
- Can find a synagogue hosting visiting ultra-orthodox Hasidim and drag girlfriend Ana to their whirling dance and heartfelt songs in tugging minor melodies.
- Can fail to note that Hasidim do not allow women to join in dance and song.
- Can watch the men dance arm-in-arm and kiss one another and sense their hands on damp white shirts, the smell of their sweat. Can find two Hasidic women on the sidelines in wigs and long clothes whispering each into the ear of the other, a soft hand on a soft shoulder, a hand casually around a waist. Unaware of the homoerotic buzz, can go home and put on stockings and a long dress with a high neckline and teach myself to sit with legs held together, ankles to the side, *like a Woman*.
- Can seek out local Hasidim and allow myself to be led into ancient, heady, humbling, silencing study of ancient Jewish texts in archaic Hebrew, conversations in deep male voices echoing across millennia.
- Can memorize lists of Hebrew verbs, navigate their convoluted declensions, and master the poetry in the Hebrew prayer book, which I memorize.
- Can accept that a rabbi can say black is white even when he does.
- Can let Jewish Law take over my days, *this is how you dress, eat, speak, pray, think*. Can turn up the volume until it drowns out my mother's wails.
- Can settle my impossible desires on an ever-elusive God and feel it like pain, like a bruise.
- Can watch Ana walk away.
- Can sit in a psychiatrist's office with a serene impassive gaze as my mother shouts about soul-stealing Hasidim. Can retort that my profound new life is far superior to hers, and watch her crumple.
- Can graduate early, stomp away, and leave home for university. Can get full financial aid, find an apartment, roommate, kosher food, pens and notebooks. Can shop and cook and maintain a four-point average, even if my mother never calls.

- Can find a clutch of Jewish students celebrating a Hasidic Sabbath around folding tables covered with piles of hand-torn challah bread. Can sit, women are not to sing in public, as the boys in their new soft beards belt out Hasidic tunes. *A tzadik saint will bloom, his enemies will lick the dust!*
- Can ignore dreams of a female lover with black curls and long delicate hands.

AGE EIGHTEEN:

- Can say yes to an arranged marriage to a man I don't know.
- Can say yes when I don't know what love is.
- Can stand in the mikveh pool the night before the wedding, droplets flung from newly cropped hair, echoes, bubbles, heart lost in a hollow, and utter a body prayer that goes something like *Here. Take this.*
- Can pose at my wedding to Levi like a white queen on a wicker throne, even when my father, in his summer suit and white carnation, the music paused, fails to bless me. Instead, he leans in and kisses my forehead. Can then allow myself to be led blind to the wedding canopy bearing his damp kiss, my face and his kiss covered with a thick linen cloth.
- Over the roar of his kiss, can count seven blind circles I pace around Levi for the seven heavens that are now supposed to have my husband at their center.
- Can dance past sister Amy with her shining eyes and track marks down her arm.
- Can, late that night, present myself to my husband as a gift to the Cause, even if his body is not a soft echo of mine.
- Can do so even though birth control is forbidden.
- Can get up the next morning and pull on the nylon wig of a Hasidic Wife over my pert teen haircut without saying good-bye.

AGE TWENTY:

- Can coach husband Levi for a job interview, in his yarmulka, untrimmed beard and hopeful face, and watch him go off to face rejection. Can coordinate a move to Houston where he finds a job far below his qualifications.
- Can offer our obedience to the local Hasidic rabbi. Can hold myself up as a role model for his budding community.

AGE TWENTY-ONE TO TWENTY-NINE:

- Can hear Levi's sigh in the dark and understand he's wondering why sex is always over so soon. Can still take pleasure in the growing mound of my belly, the shifting profile and mysterious flutters that aren't mine.
- Can sleepwalk into a room at two AM where a baby is squalling and ease my swollen nipple into his mouth before waking up. Can change a diaper in the dark.

AGE THIRTY:

- Can diaper three at once, each a different size, as two older ones spar on the floor over a game of Candyland, me pregnant with the sixth, without burning the mac-and-cheese dinner, and remember to wash my hands.
- Can turn broccoli into trees, carrots into copper pennies, and bananas into flowers, while holding three illogical conversations at the same time.

- Can coach a child in lisping blessings for washing, dressing, prayers, and food.
- Can teach any child how to tie shoes.
- Can get exhausted Levi not to shout about the cost of ritual objects, kosher food, and tuition in the Hasidic school.
- Can prepare Sabbath feasts of salads, fish, soup, chicken, challahs, kugels, and cakes, manage a staff of children peeling, cleaning, and setting the table, and also maintain a fleet of bicycles.
- Can choose elegant clothes that hide my stretched and shapeless body, then nod my smiling assent at the Sabbath table as Levi holds up a still-warm challah and blesses it as if it's his own creation.
- Can get a job teaching boys with sidelocks and yarmulkas painted with Hebrew aphorisms (we want the Messiah NOW) and girls in long sleeves in muted colors and skirts too big for their child bodies.
- Can teach five year-olds to sound out Hebrew words and six year-olds to translate in singsong: *bereishis* in the beginning *bara elokim* God created *eis hashmayaim* the-e-e heavens...
- Can turn a classroom into a magic space where a serpent can open his mouth and speak, where a Rebbe is a saint who can look into you with piercing eyes and make cancer disappear or tell you the truth of your future.
- Can do all of the above through chronic insomnia peppered with erotic lesbian dreams.

AGE THIRTY-FOUR:

- Can understand—blind panic, sitting up in bed, glowing clock numbers hanging in the dark—that this eighth pregnancy will kill me.
- Can admit I'm afraid it *won't* kill me.
- Can pace through the next day, thinking, muttering, then stop and say the "A" word. Out loud. Can convince Levi, the doctor, and a rabbi that I could die and talk them all into sanctioning an abortion to *save a life*.
- Can hold my anger at their power over me; can hold it like a precious newborn.
- Can refuse to grieve. It was not a child. It was not Leibl with his comic books or Liba with her deft hands, not Mendel or Avrami racing on dirt bikes and then throwing themselves to the floor to battle over a board game. It wasn't sturdy Sarah who says, "I do it MYSELF" or solitary Itzik who wanders at will or baby Shalom still clamoring for my breast.

- Can hear the rabbi say, "Do not speak of this to anyone!" Can spend two days in bed in a stupor, then get up and begin to write what I must not speak aloud. Can write all night, through many nights.
- Can fail to stop with my story. Can fill my pages with secret sins of my community: an abusive father, two yeshiva boys in love with one another, a mother of seven who aborts her child.
- Can print, delete, and hide it all under my bed, because who would marry my children?
- Can read what I wrote and hear polemics and aphorisms and outdated mythical language in my writing, long implanted in me, and struggle against this for weeks, mystified.
- Can dare to go to the public library, God forbid, to see how real writers do it.
- Can look both ways, lift my chin, and walk through double glass doors that open like an invitation. Can sink to the floor before a dusty shelf of poetry, long skirt billowing around me, and pull out neglected slim volumes, stack them around me on the skirt, and find honest cutting voices that astonish me.
- Can take home a whole stack of books and read through child clamor, meals, read in the bathtub, and in bed. Can hear my daughter calling and look up unfocused from my book, then sigh like a sigh of parting.

- Can take my children to the public library, usher them through those glass doors and steer them to books in which children have adventures and girls can have dreams.
- Can fantasize making love to Adrienne Rich.

AGE FORTY:

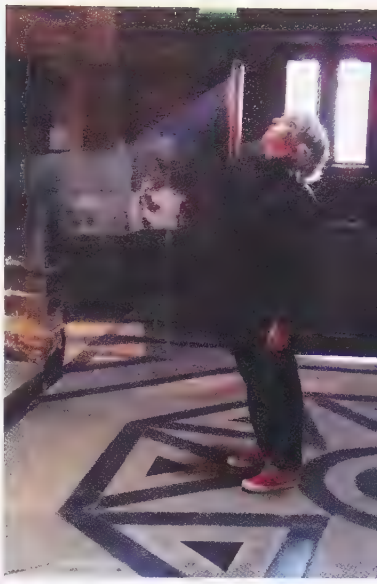
- Can apply to a university writing program when one entire page of its application reads List Here All of Your Awards and Publications.
- Can rip up the rejection letter and go back to the kitchen, only to hear Levi saying, "Wait—you're on the waiting list!"
- Can sit in class in scarf and skirt and scribble notes in the margins of other notes: "Look up *hegemony, sui generes, epistemology*." Can read 50 books the first semester and keep a log. Can read feminist criticism when I don't know what feminism is. Can instruct children over the phone how to make hot dogs.
- Can curl up on the Sabbath with a beloved Hebrew volume only to find, with my new eyes, ignorance, misinformation and misogyny dully glowing between the wise old lines.
- Can park in a university lot one fall day of my second year, as if facing eternity. Can wiggle into new jeans, open my collar, push up my sleeves, and pull off the skirt and scarf. Can get out of the car to a cool breeze on my scalp like first rain.
- Can, after class, climb back into soft familiar Hasidic garb, go home and cook and clean. Can still sit as Levi drones on at the Sabbath table and our lanky growing younger children spar and roll their eyes and two walk away.

AGE FORTY-TWO:

- Can invite myself over to meet gray-eyed Jane, we'll just be friends. Can, on the second visit, let her throw my scarf to the floor and peel my long clothes away like tearing a caul.
- Can inch open the back door to the kitchen, skirt rubbing heightened skin, nostrils flared, and slip into midnight air. Can let the car glide down the drive in neutral, white-knuckled. Can wait and start the motor out on the street so that it could be anyone, a passing car that stalled, a Hasidic woman escaping to her lesbian lover.
- Can welcome gossip's inevitability. Can hold up my head in the grocery and walk past two old friends who quickly gather their children to their skirts.
- Can tell Levi and watch him fall to his knees. Can understand that I'm outside the bubble now, but inside it nothing must change, watch him beg like a penitent, his hands open in front of his chest as he cries, "Let me stay. Let me keep the house."
- Can find a lawyer to usher me into a world I still don't know, full of movies and violent news and sports and fast brash language, a world without blinding modesty or soothing aphorisms to fill my days, God ever at my sleeve. When she says, "This is Texas—there's no way you'll get custody," can tell her about my two youngest, 12 and 13, and know that they will carry this like a stone. Can still say, "I have to do this."
- Can call my mother. Can laugh out loud when she says, "Oh my god you're coming home!"
- Can leave at a run, a 46-year-old refugee clutching an old Hebrew prayer book and box of photographs.
- Can refuse to say good-bye.

AGE FORTY-FIVE TO FIFTY-SEVEN:

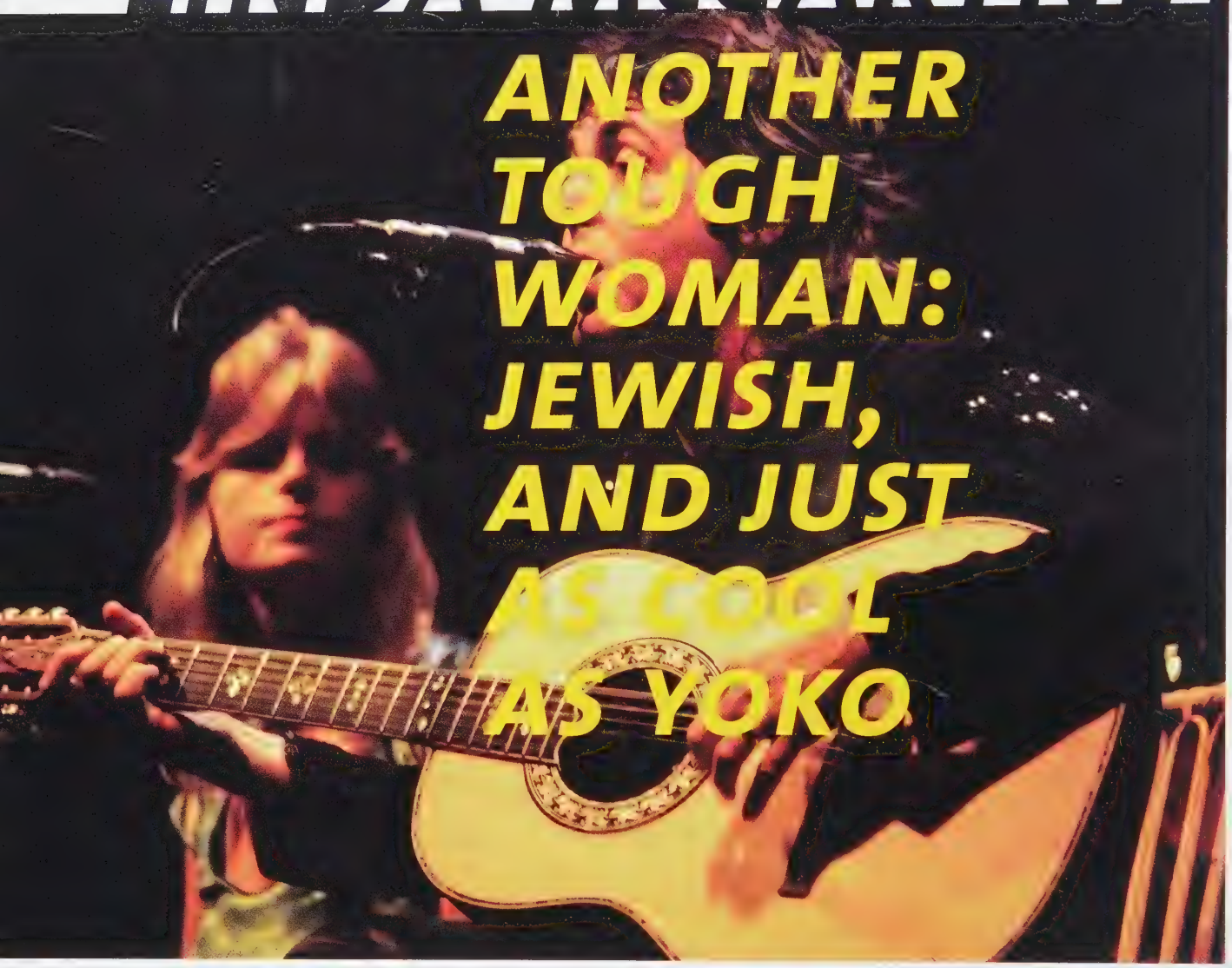
- Can find work, an apartment, a roommate (teenaged son), new clothes, pens, pencils and notebooks.
- Can learn how to figure tax and tip in a restaurant, navigate cable television, and find my way around the internet.
- Can spend months trying to catch up on politics, movies, books even though I will never catch up, I'm a new immigrant into my own country.



- Can travel to each of my children, grown and nearly grown, and keep giving, talking, listening.
- Can sit on the floor playing with a babbling bouncing grandchild.
- Can decide to walk away from a calm woman from Mississippi because she is not like me, her background, training, vocabulary are all so very different, how will she ever understand. Can realize my mistake even as I take her into my arms and start to say, *I'm leaving you.*
- Can wake next to her startled at my joy every morning thereafter, now nine years and four months, ever grateful to have survived my stupidity.
- Can kayak with her over rapids and around roots and reefs, through narrow waterways beneath great Karst humps in China, navigating Florida mangroves over shadowy manatees or Texas' shimmering heat as we watch for alligators. Can hear the dip of our tandem oars as we catch the flick of a Great Blue.
- Can remember childhood delight on Texas horses and balance on a wiry pony, the uncertain girlfriend on another next to me as we pick our way across the Mongolian steppes on a rocky incline. Around our forms on tilting horseback are overlapping curves of land like pregnant bellies to the horizon, air clear and cold, just vastness and blue sky, hills dotted with thick-haired camels, sheep, horses, and cattle, all of them seemingly oblivious to the stark beauty as if waking free every morning in this amazing world could possibly be a reason for complacence. ■

Leah Lax's memoir, Uncovered: How I Left Hassidic Life and Finally Came Home, *will be published in August, 2015 by She Writes Press. She lives in Houston with her partner, Susan, and their Airedale, Gracie.*

LINDA McCARTNEY



ANOTHER TOUGH WOMAN: JEWISH, AND JUST AS COOL AS YOKO

by NELL BERAM

Linda McCartney, unlike Yoko, was white and blonde. Like Yoko, she was hard to put in a box. She is closely identified with the 1960s, during which she took classic photos of rock stars like the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, the Doors, Janis Joplin, and Bob Dylan, and her talent as a photographer was showcased in several books (the best known is perhaps 1992's *Linda McCartney's Sixties: Portrait of an Era*), as well as in countless galleries. McCartney didn't court attention by flashing butterfly-wing eyelashes like Pattie Boyd or swizzle-stick dimensions like Twiggy. She didn't wear a mini anything. She sailed into public consciousness as Paul McCartney's girlfriend—they married in 1969—during her Breck Girl phase; then enjoyed a long farm-girl-with-a-mullet phase, when Wings was soaring. She died at 56, in 1998, following

PHOTO: JIM SUMMARIA

her Florence Henderson phase, when she wore gender-negating vests and plain-talked to cameras about her decades-long commitment to animal rights and vegetarianism. At the time of her death, Linda was wealthy in her own right, through her best-selling cookbooks, starting with *Linda McCartney's Home Cooking*, and her line of still-going-strong eponymous frozen vegetarian entrées, which, in 1997, had sales in England of more than $56 million.

She was also, though it is almost never mentioned, a Jew. In one of the more sustained looks at the iconic McCartney marriage, Tom Doyle's book *Man on the Run: Paul McCartney in the 1970s*, there is no mention of Linda's Judaism, though the Wings drummer Denny Seiwell does note that she "had a lot of chutzpah." But the comment was likely made with no awareness of her background. It wouldn't be fair to say that Linda *hid* her Jewishness, though she was generally leery of religion's divisiveness, but it would be fair to say that her parents' heavy-duty ambivalence about being Jews complicated her ownership of the badge.

Linda's mother, Louise Sara Lindner, was from a prominent and moneyed Cleveland family of German Jews. In 1937, she married down when she wed lawyer Leopold Vail Epstein, the son of Russian-Jewish immigrants who had raised him in the Bronx. According to *Fab: An Intimate Life of Paul McCartney*, by Howard Sounes, the gregarious Louise was a devoted synagogue-goer as a young woman, but Lee persuaded her that, for their future children's sake, it would be better to present as less Jewish. Before Linda's older brother, John, was born, in 1939, the Epsteins became the Eastmans, and the kids got appropriately *pareve* names. In addition to John and Linda, there were Laura and Louise, the latter named, in a consciously Christian gesture, after Linda's living mother.

Lee's stepson Philip Sprayregen told Sounes that one of Lee's favorite expressions was "Think Yiddish, look British." "If someone asked [Lee] flat out if he was Jewish, he would admit that he was," said Sprayregen, "but he would never volunteer that information, and I would say that he was probably glad when people thought otherwise."

Lee and Louise didn't completely renounce their heritage. "I think [my parents] tried to have something for Passover once, and we all made fun of it," Linda told her friend the music journalist Danny Fields in his book *Linda McCartney: A Portrait*. But the overarching message to the Eastman kids was clear: being Jewish was something that one might not want to advertise.

As a child, Linda was a loner whose favorite pastimes were riding horses and exploring a stream in a vacant lot in her hometown of well-to-do Scarsdale, New York; she was more interested in looking for creatures under rocks than she was in playing with the children of bankers and physicians in the neighborhood. Six months after Linda's death, Paul told the musician Chrissie Hynde in an interview, "She came from a strata *[sic]* of society which was really probably American aristocracy and she never really valued it. She thought it had a lot of false values, that there was a lot of social climbing and she never wanted that." It wouldn't be a stretch to call Linda's ebullient mother, Louise, with whom Linda wasn't close, a socialite.

Lee Eastman specialized in entertainment law and did well (he was "one of the most avid and active art collectors in America," Christie's auction house wrote after his death), so renowned artists and musicians were an intrinsic part of Linda's childhood. The abstract expressionist Willem de Kooning was Lee's longtime client and friend, and the family occasionally had outings to visit the likes of the painter Franz Kline. Jack Lawrence, a popular songwriter (as well as Lee's client), wrote the smash-hit single "Linda" for Lee's eldest daughter in 1946, and it's hard not to imagine that it gave the little girl a sense of her own importance. One account has it that Lee commissioned the song.

Unlike her three siblings, Linda did wretchedly at school, and Lee scolded her for it. She was the kid who looked out the classroom window instead of paying attention, and since this was in the 1940s and '50s, there was presumably no consideration that she might have had a learning disability. Because it was inconceivable that someone from a family like hers would not go to college, Linda attended the University of Arizona, in Tucson, figuring that the opportunities for horseback riding would offset the necessity to occasionally hit the books. She was in Arizona on March 1, 1962, when Louise Eastman (who never took the same flights as her husband) went down with American Airlines Flight 1, which crashed in New York's Jamaica Bay.

Twenty-year-old Linda came home and stayed long enough to attend her mother's funeral, then escaped back to Arizona and Mel See, her geology-student boyfriend. She became pregnant almost instantly—Heather Louise See was born on December 31, 1962, when Linda was 21. Before Heather's birth was a marriage, a couple of years later a divorce. Linda and Heather moved to the East Coast in 1965, temporarily parking themselves with Lee, remarried now (and a stepfather) but still living in Scarsdale. He wanted Linda to own the decisions she had made—to drop out of college, to drop out of a marriage—which meant getting a job to support herself and her toddler daughter. Linda rented an apartment on the Upper East Side, which was full of people like the Eastmans: white, wealthy, style-conscious, and Jewish. "Maybe if I'd known the city better when I first started looking," she told Danny Fields, "I'd have gone downtown."

Fortunately, Linda had discovered her talent for photography in Arizona, and that paid the bills in New York. It also became her chief artistic outlet for the rest of her life.

Lee didn't approve of Linda's lifestyle, which included keeping company with the scrappy-looking rock musicians of the day. "He's always telling me it's going to get me in trouble, it's going to be gone overnight, and I'll be back being an office intern," Linda told Fields at the time. (She was briefly a receptionist at

Town & Country magazine.) "I was miserable staying where I was, and that state of mind was worse to me than the possibility that this would all be over tomorrow, which of course I never believed. I love what I'm doing, but my family sure isn't making it easy for me to be who I want to be."

Lee might not have wanted bohemia to get its psychedelic, smoky clutches on his daughter, but, professionally speaking, artists had been good to him, too.

Linda met Paul at a club while she was on a photography assignment in London, and she did not go on to become the typical rock-and-roll wife. She wasn't a classic beauty (maybe that was her ancestry manifesting in her longish nose), and she was the rare person whose appearance actually suffered when she wore cosmetics. But her self-assurance was radiant, and Paul defended his decision to include his musically dubious wife in his band Wings by explaining that he needed her there "for my confidence." He meant for her confidence—she had "bucket-loads of American confidence," Sounes writes, explaining that that was an important aspect of Paul's attraction to her.

Linda did, indeed, seem to have a lot of chutzpah. She was the cook who didn't measure her ingredients, the photographer who knew she had snapped a winning picture before she developed her film. And about Linda's decision to start a vegetarian-foods company, Paul told Chrissie Hynde that his wife was "the least likely person to ever get into business." Some of her acquaintances have said that Linda Eastman let it be known that it was her intent to one day marry a rock star. Assuming that's true, it's impossible not to be impressed that she made it to the top of the heap.

If there was one facet of her life about which Linda had no business feeling confident, it was when she was performing as part of Wings. She knew she wasn't much of a keyboard player—fraught rehearsals occasionally brought her to tears—but, again, she was armed with good defenses. Doyle writes this of Linda's anticipation of bad reviews in the States while touring with Wings: "Initially fearing that she would be eviscerated by the American press, when asked by a Rolling Stone reporter if she had a message for her critics, she replied, 'My answer is always 'Fuck off'."

One of the last songs Linda wrote, when she was undergoing cancer treatments and probably knew that her days were numbered, was "The Light Comes from Within," in which she goes for broke, singing broadly, "You say I'm simple/You say I'm a hick/You're fucking no one/You stupid dick."

While Linda, unlike Lee, might not have been diplomatic, she was, like her father, shrewd. "It wasn't until [Linda] came along that I realized what was happening to me," Tom Doyle quotes Paul as saying. "She made me see I was surrounded by con men and leeches." She had assumed the role in her marriage that her father had in his clients' lives, but, in a move that would have been uncharacteristic of Lee, she scuppered at least one business opportunity because of her values, putting the kibosh on an almost-signed deal with Volkswagen to sponsor one of Paul's tours. She felt that the car industry was un-ecological, and she didn't want the McCartney name linked with it.

Many of the choices that Linda made after she married Paul can be seen as a referendum on her upbringing. Her parents had a big house; she lived happily in a small one on a working farm in Sussex, England, with her husband and four children. (At one point the four kids shared one bedroom.) Linda's mother had a cook in the household; Linda was the cook in her household, and wrote the daffy song "Cook of the House" about it.

Harvard Law School graduate Lee, in keeping with the Jewish stereotype, was an ardent believer in education, but Linda and Paul enjoyed a steady diet of marijuana that sometimes made them seem a little dull-witted. As for the McCartney kids, they went to local schools in rural England, their peers the children of farmers. And when their parents went on tour, so, too, did the young McCartneys. Doyle quotes Linda as saying that she and Paul had given Heather "the choice of school or coming with us, and she chose the latter. I mean, this is an education in itself, isn't it? We're just a gang of musicians touring around."

But Linda didn't trample all of Lee's ideas. George Martin may have been the fifth Beatle, but Lee Eastman was the third

PHOTO: CAPITAL RECORDS

Linda's father, Lee Eastman (né Leopold Epstein) didn't approve of Linda's lifestyle, which included keeping company with the scrappy-looking rock musicians of the day. "He's always telling me it's going to get me in trouble, it's going to be gone overnight, and I'll be back being an office intern."

McCartney. Lee, with son John's help, represented Paul during his 1970 lawsuit to dissolve the Beatles, and then stayed on as his business manager. Music publishing was one of Lee's professional specialties, and he was "thinking Yiddish" when he nudged Paul to invest in something that the musician actually cared about. "Guys and Dolls," "A Chorus Line," "Annie," "Grease"—Lee fattened up the music publishing division at McCartney Productions Limited so significantly that, by the time he died, in 1991, MPL owned 25,000 original compositions. (This is what routinely lands Paul on all those "richest" lists—not just his tours and songwriting royalties.) There was perhaps a whiff of hypocrisy behind Linda and Paul's periodic denigration of "the suits."

The besuited Eastmans were instrumental in getting Paul out of the seven-year jail sentence he faced in 1980 after he was caught with marijuana at Narita International Airport in Tokyo, where Wings had flown to start a tour. Philip Sprayregen's memory of his stepfather's rage speaks directly to Lee's injunction to "Think Yiddish, look British." As Sprayregen told Sounes, elaborating on Lee's emotional investment in Paul's becoming knighted, "He went nuts. He was ballistic….He said, 'My God, my daughter could have been a [lady], and he blew it!'"

Paul was finally awarded knighthood in 1997, a year before Linda died, so she got her British title. Still, she might have been England's only lady with a bit of the Borscht Belt in her. She was "always one for the joke," Paul told Chrissie Hynde. "She just had a line for everything." Again, photography showed Linda at her best. There are some supremely funny pictures of her mugging for someone else's camera. In the hospital, holding her newborn baby, she squalls in sympathy with little Mary. And in another photo, wearing sunglasses, a black T-shirt, and a bathing suit that introduces hips that have obviously seen childbirth, she holds a bottle of Jack Daniel's and leans against a car—a perfect, knowing parody of unknowing buffoonery. What other rock wife would have done that?

Or this? After Linda was interviewed in the early 1990s about her vegetarianism, on the English television show *This Morning*, the hosts got her talking about the pros and cons of fame and its attendant responsibilities. To illustrate her point about the speed with which rabid fans can turn on you, Linda described the scene in Martin Scorsese's film "The King of Comedy," in which an elderly, caricatured Jewish woman flags down Jerry Lewis's character, a beloved Johnny Carson-like talk show host, on a Manhattan street and demands that he speak with her nephew, with whom she's chatting on a pay telephone. When she's rebuffed, she says to Lewis's character—and here Linda turns to the camera—"You should get *cancer*!" It's a remarkable split-second embodiment of her birthright: New York Jew.

In his book, Danny Fields notes that in April 1999, a year after Linda died, Paul was known to say about the birth of his first grandchild, Arthur, "He's a very clever little lad. His mother is Jewish and his father is Christian, so he chose to be born between Passover and Easter." Writes Fields, "Now, this is astonishing and quite lovely. Mary, Paul and Linda's daughter and the mother of little Arthur, is of course one-half [sic] Jewish. Yet Paul doesn't say 'half,' he says, 'His mother is Jewish.' We now have Paul being more upfront about Linda's religion than Linda ever was." As is Stella McCartney, Linda and Paul's famous fashion-designer daughter, who definitely self-identifies as a Jew.

After Linda died, Paul told various interviewers that he wept for a year and then made himself move on. In 2002, he wed charity campaigner Heather Mills, who shared his humble English origins. After that marriage failed, he turned to a familiar type: a moneyed, Jewish New Yorker. Unlike Linda, Nancy Shevell, whom Paul wed in 2011, isn't an artist or an activist, and old photos suggest that, again unlike Linda, she had her nose bobbed. Still, Nancy comes across as more Jewish than WASPy-looking Linda ever did. Paul seems smitten.

Maybe he sees a light coming from within. ■

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Continuous Prayer, 2001, oil on canvas

Strange Comfort

TURNING *to* HOLOCAUST ART FOR SURVIVAL *of a* DIFFERENT KIND

by CAROL DINE, *as told to* SUSAN SCHNUR

One day, a week after my second chemo treatment for my fourth bout with cancer, I was feeling all right and decided to take the T to Newbury Street in Boston to see an exhibit of paintings by the renowned artist Samuel Bak, who survived the Holocaust. I was bald and wore a black turban.

That afternoon, I stood in front of "Da Capo" at the Pucker Gallery, a painting of shepherds sitting next to a pyre of violins, facing away from one another, hands raised, pretending to play music with their wooden staffs. The head of one shepherd had been shaved. All I could feel was my cold, bald head beneath my turban, and, thinking I might faint, I rushed home. The next day, I started to write about this painting: "...the mourners play on/past *shloshim*/past *shneim asar chodesh*...." [Quartet]*.

As my treatments continued, I visited the gallery as often as I could, and I kept writing—feeling ill, feeling terrified of death,

Where it Ends, 2008, oil on canvas

ALLEY

Facades adorned
with azure light
that floats down the alley
into a scatter
of empty bowls.

Hanging over a door,
a ladle like a mezuzah.

A child's first cup,
a grandmother's lost pitcher;
ribs pile up like butter knives.

Some afternoon,
the sky will darken.
Rain will come down
and collect in the saucers,

Cleansing
the broken seams.

[*past the thirtieth day of mourning, past the twelfth month.]

but also experiencing this art as the thing that was getting me through. It was strange comfort, a ritual of call and response.

When I was too weak to leave the house, I asked Mari, the gallery assistant, to send me images of the paintings and drawings that had especially moved me. I focused my imagination on one image at a time.

I had no plans—no idea that these poems might become a book. I was simply grateful to be writing. At first I thought that I might write just a few poems inspired by Bak's art, but I couldn't stop. When I had three poems that I considered polished—that had been vetted by my writing group—I emailed them off to Mari as a gesture of thanks, because she had taken me behind the scenes to view Bak's work on the second floor.

Without telling me, she forwarded the poems to Sam Bak, and within the week, he wrote to me: "I am greatly moved by your words on my art. To know that it can bring what you describe. It is more than I could dare to hope for." My previous book, *Van Gogh in Poems*, was written as if in the voice of a painter who was long dead. I'd also written poems about the work of Frida Kahlo and Mary Cassatt—but Bak was a living artist, who, at 80, was still painting. Hearing his positive response affirmed what I was creating and made me feel less alone. While writing, I was aware that I might die. This realization propelled me and made the work urgent.

To the Ghetto, 2001, mixed media on paper

TRYING TO GET OUT

Rocks are flattened
into footprints,
the ghetto wall,
a breaker for the waves.

A gully of pink light
washes the cobblestones.

Where the path ends,
the burlap sack
opens its deranged mouth,

The body
of the sack
roiling
as if something
were trying
to get out.

Magdalen's severed arm reminded me of my missing breast.

In This Direction, 1969–2011, oil on canvas

MAGDALEN

She has Jesus's
unkempt red hair.

She tries to point the way
to Golgotha;
the weight of her grief
severs her arm.

Spiraling behind her,
smoke
from the crematorium
where Jesus
would have died again.

In the darkened niche,
she closes her eyes,
prays
for history's
resurrection.

The images that I chose to write about actually chose me. With some, the objects pulled me in: a chess piece, an oversized pear, a broken easel. The poems would expand, grow into being as I wrote them.

With other paintings, such as "In This Direction," I knew where the poem might lead. I "knew" that the naked, red-headed woman was Magdalen. What drew me to the figure was the shock of her severed arm. My body, my breasts felt similarly severed. When I looked closer at the background, I saw smoke rising from the crematorium and, given that Jesus was a Jew, I penned the line, "Where Jesus/ would have died again."

Draped, 2003, watercolor on paper

LOT'S WIFE, ANOTHER LOOK

She's bundled
for storage
then left
upright,
disgraced.

Face, shrouded
in gray cloth,
her necklace,
a rope.

Her breast is the mouth
of an earthenware jar,
weighted with salt.

Defiant again,
she leans
into a wash of clouds.

In the mist
above her forehead,
God's punishing eye.

Here, I explore the terrible price of defiance. "She's bundled/ for storage/ then left/ upright,/ disgraced." Of course this painting triggered memories of my childhood, too. If I spoke out or argued with my father, I was subjected to his rage and humiliation. He was a physician, and he knew just how to hit me without killing me. As I was writing the poem's final line, I heard in my subconscious "my father's fist," but instead I wrote, "God's punishing eye."

I came to recognize Sam's recurrent symbols and what they meant. The chess pieces—because after the Holocaust, Sam's stepfather played game after game with him. The sacks—because his father put him in a sack when he was nine and smuggled him out of the labor camp in the Vilnius Ghetto; his father and all his grandparents were murdered immediately afterwards.

Pillowcases—because the Nazis allowed him to take one thing from his house, and, though he wanted to take his teddy bear, he didn't want to seem

The severed arm also reminded me of my father's soul-killing emotional abuse which accompanied me throughout my childhood and on into my adult life. I still need to remind myself every day that I am smart, worthy. As a secular Jew, I rarely go to synagogue, but I spend every Yom Kippur alone at home, reading aloud from my father's prayer book. Some years ago at temple I noticed a printed sheet on one of the seats and I took it with me. "Know whom you put to shame," it says, "for in the likeness of God is she made." If only there had been such a message when I was growing up, perhaps I might have told someone what I had to endure.

What drew me to "Draped" was the figure bundled in cloth and tied with ropes. I saw the chess piece—a pawn—as female. I felt her powerlessness, her imposed silence. At first I didn't know who this figure was, but then I remembered Lot's wife, who was nameless—another indignity—and centered the poem around her.

Portrait of a Memorialist, 2008, oil on canvas

EVE'S NIGHTMARE

In a black jacket,
she stands
with her back to the garden.

Where the tree was,
a chimney
spews
smoke.

She hears children humming;
her dark hair, twisted
with wire,
her felt hat, heavy
as stone.

She prays
to the hollowness.

When she tries to awake,
her powdered lids
are nailed shut.

like a baby. So he took his pillow, but it got heavier and heavier as the Jews were marched down the street in the pouring rain, and so he dropped it. The pears—because, as Sam says, smiling, "I much prefer them to apples." With all he has had to overcome, he has maintained a sense of humor!

Over the next 11 months, I sent Sam poems, one by one. The work began to feel collaborative. "Your poems are like echoes that return to me, and their volume feels stronger than the sound of their origin," he wrote back.

Sometimes a poem inspired a new painting. "Your poem reads so profoundly into the myth of the painting's image that I have decided to dedicate it to a much larger size." He respected my vision, and never censored me. He treated me as an equal, although I would have been threatened if I'd actually known how famous he was. Still, I didn't think about him when I wrote. The work was everything.

One evening at dinner at his and his wife Josee's home, I decided to tell them my secret: that my long blonde hair was a wig, and that I was undergoing chemo. I'd written about my experiences with breast cancer in my memoir, *Places in the Bone*, and I gave them a copy. The parallels of suffering were now out on the table, and that seemed so imbalanced to me. Holocaust and cancer…? But they were very appreciative of my courage, of what I was going through and had gone through, and that added another layer of depth to Sam's and my relationship.

I admit to feeling guilty during the whole time I was writing these poems. No one in my family had been brutalized by the Holocaust; they died of natural causes. My paternal grandparents, immigrants from Lithuania, whose original name was Daen, came to America, assimilated, and didn't even give my father a bar mitzvah.

At the same time, I felt worthy because Sam praised my descriptions of his images of grief. That gave me permission. I knew, from reading *Painted in Words*, his autobiography, that Sam and his mother had endured hell, and that gave me strength. To survive, Sam used art, and although our struggles were radically different, so did I.

Bak's genius—expressing the beauty that exists in horror, the hope that lives amid destruction—speaks to me. Above the ruined ghetto, he paints an azure sky or floating white clouds. Images fill with cerulean, orange, sun-yellow, gold, red.

For the cover of *Orange Night* I chose a bird [see p.36]. At first glance, the bird is pure white, a dove suspended in a tree, surrounded by a peaceful, misted sky. But look closer and the bird is fragile, made of paper, its wing a *tallit*, or the Israeli flag. And the tree branches end in talons.

In February 2012, Sam wrote, "Please keep overwhelming me with your inspired poetry. In the future I can see a whole book dedicated to the fertile encounter of our mutual visions." And so our book happened. I dedicated it to my dear friend Tehila Lieberman, who assisted me with the Jewish content. And to a very caring man, Dr. Steven Come, my oncologist.

I held my first copy of *Orange Night* in the Pucker Gallery, sitting beside a friend on a low wooden bench. We turned page after glossy page. I thought, "I survived for this." She asked if I wanted to read aloud.

But I couldn't even whisper. ■

Crossing Shadows, 2012, oil on canvas

IF ADAM AND EVE WERE OLD

They would ride in a wheelbarrow,
Adam, sun-darkened,
snug in the cart;
pale Eve, her gown frayed,
leaning from a plank
between the wheels.

Behind them, steely blue
specters of the sons
they had to leave:
Cain's broad shadow
unfurls like a runway;
Abel's shadow, cut short.

The couple are tied
to the past,
to the unseen future.

Exiled, they cannot move
into their dream of the garden
before all this dust,
the parched grass,
the broken road.

Orange Night *[Pucker Art Publications, 2014], is Carol Dine's fourth published collection of poetry. Her memoir,* Places in the Bone *[Rutgers U. Press, 2005], discusses the redemptive power of art. She is currently working on* Resistance, *poems in the voices of women who have resisted war, terror or abuse. She teaches at Massachusetts College of Art and Design.*

Comic Matriarchs

by Danica Davidson

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (creators of Superman) and Art Spiegelman (of *Maus)* are acknowledged to have had a strong influence on comics, but not much attention has been turned on female Jewish comics creators until now. Sarah Lightman spurred the creation of "Graphic Details: Confessional Comics by Jewish Women," an exhibition recently in London, showing the work of 18 Jewish women, including Lightman, Miriam Katin, Ariel Schrag, Trina Robbins, Aline Kominsky-Crumb and Vanessa Davis.

The success of the exhibition led to the book ***Graphic Details: Jewish Women's Confessional Comics in Essays and Interviews*** (McFarland, $49.95). This anthology takes an academic approach to the intersection of women, Judaism and comics. All the women from the exhibit appear in these pages through biographies and work samples, in beautiful full-color spreads. Some of them are interviewed about their work, and essays by other comics scholars discuss the meaning, influence and strength in the creators' comics. The book does not stop here: it also details the lives and works of other female Jewish comics creators.

One essay discusses Charlotte Salomon, a graphic artist who was killed in Auschwitz, and whose self-portrait was the cover of Lilith, Winter 1994–95. After multiple suicides in her family and the increasing threat of Nazism, Salomon had turned to painting her life and surroundings in a way that has shaped modern comics. Author Ariela Freedman describes Salomon's *Leben? oder Theater? Ein Spingespiel* (*Life, Or Theater? An Opera*) as what "might be the most powerful Jewish women's graphic narrative ever drawn and written. But it is almost entirely absent in critical discourse on comics and on graphic narrative. Salomon is frequently left out of genealogies of comics, and until recently, of Holocaust writers."

Not all of the creators discussed in this book take on such dramatic subjects. Corinne Pearlman, Kominsky-Crumb, Miss Lasko-Gross and Ariel Schrag are all known for their scatological and dark humor. Many of the women here want to use comics as a way to show the mostly unspoken parts of life, and by doing so they go against the grain of what people usually think of when they imagine comics. Instead of the typical superhero fighting crime, these comics deal with issues like miscarriages, dating, lesbian romance and self-esteem, and they're always done from the perspective of a Jewish woman.

"Not only am I not a superhero, they say, I am going to lay out all the worst parts of me and dare you to like me anyway."

About the power and passion that go with confessional comics, journalist Sarah Jaffe writes, in her essay "Telling Their Own Stories," that "Superheroes are impossibly pretty, perfect, every bit of their lives is heightened drama, and for Superman to be ugly he puts on glasses. Indie confessional comics are often purposefully ugly, showing life not only warts and all but with a few extra warts for good measure. Not only am I not a superhero, they say, I am going to lay out all the worst parts of me and dare you to like me anyway."

The book shows how much female comics creators, turned away by male-dominated publishers, turned to self-publishing or got published by women at smaller ventures. This would allow other women and men to pick up the comics and inspire them to create their own, though these indie comics never got the same attention as mainstream pieces. *Graphic Details* is a much-needed book both because of its specific information and for the fact it touches on subjects long ignored. While supplying added depth for people who are already fans of the medium, it gives insights to non-fans about why comics are so popular.

In words and pictures, the women in *Graphic Details* show what it's like to be a woman, what it's like to be Jewish, and what it's like to be human and find universal connections in the despair, triumph and love they experience in their lives.

DANICA DAVIDSON *is a writer at MTV whose children's novel about Minecraft,* Escape from the Overworld, *is being released in January.*

After Birth Comes Darkness

by Sarah M. Seltzer

Women in my family and life passed down the warning: the months a parent, traditionally but not always a woman, is home with a newborn are actually a ter-

ribly lonely time. Sure it's as joyous as everyone claims, but actually, not entirely. Thrilling, but simultaneously so terrifying. And when, inevitably, the relatives and well-wishers and perhaps the husband leave—because who has paternity leave in this day and age—it's achingly solitary lonely.

We don't live in a society that has made any moves to take this intense burden off the person who bears it on her shoulders. We don't care. And our lack of caring hurts women.

"Why so numb, so incapable, so enraged, so broken?" asks Ari, the protagonist of ***After Birth*** by **Elisa Albert**, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, $23). Ari loves her baby son, Walker. She loves him so much, is so caught up in him, that she wants to walk out into the park, leaving him safe, and quietly die of exposure.

So when Ari, going through a mix of genuine postpartum depression triggered by a C-section she feels was forced on her, mixed with garden-variety angst about her life in upstate New York and her stalled career, finds new mom Mona, it's no wonder that she gravitates directly towards her. This girl crush does not arise solely because Mona is a member of a famous riot grrl band from the 90s, a poet who gave birth at home with a midwife, a cool girl who possesses the qualities Ari lacks. It's also because Ari begins to think maybe, once upon a time, there was a way that new mothers could gather in some hut somewhere, and support each other and teach each other how to mother and be less alone. Together, she and Mona begin to create something like that hut.

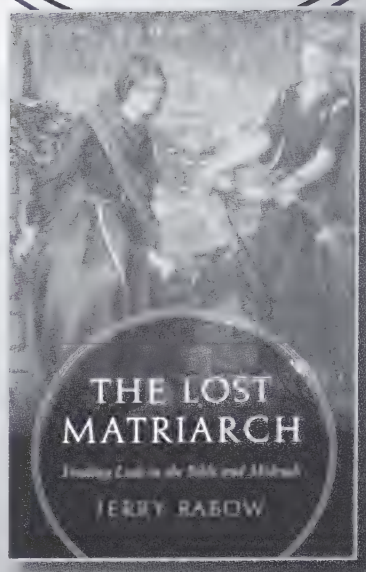
The climax of their friendship, and the novel's meandering, time-traversing plot, arrives when Ari and Mona commit to a way of mothering each others' kids that could be interpreted as either weird boundary transgression or an evolution in communal existence. Ari leaves it for us to judge. But don't judge too harshly, the narrative warns its readers. Because new motherhood is so much harder than you think.

Albert's previous novel, *The Book of Dahlia*, provided a merciless dissection of the darkest part of human life, its final chapters—and in the case of that novel's doomed Dahlia, a premature, sad final chapter it was. While Albert's blunt, profanity-laced inquiry into the ways human beings and families fail each other and contemporary life fails us all, is consistently sharp and funny, in that book the combination of her dark style and the dark subject matter felt almost too unrelenting.

Mothering each other's kids is either a weird boundary transgression or an evolution.

In *After Birth*, Albert turns her now-trademark dark humor and merciless lens on the first chapters of life from the perspective of a new mother, and the result is a perfect balance of light and dark. "Swell little guy," she says of her son. "Sunny super lovely love of a guy. If I kill myself, maybe he'll grow up to be a poet."

There's a dirty secret about female friendships that Albert excavates over and over again while tracing her narrators' histories with other women, which are clearly so much more interesting to her (and, to be honest, to me) than another novel about romance. She lays out longing, the fear and the desperation, the dozens of betrayals that constitute a woman's history with women, gay or straight. She shows us the way we seek in other women for the things we don't have ourselves, the way we love and hate them for it. And in the case of



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Jerry Rabow

"With imaginative insight, Jerry Rabow has placed a human face and heart onto the persona of this biblical drama of love, loyalty, and intrigue. The author endows this ancient romance with empathic contemporary relevance."—Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, founder of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous and Jewish World Watch

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After Birth, that means looking at other mothers for the things you don't have yourself. Sisterhood. Your own mother. A partner who understands. Albert's writing excels in simultaneously showing us the allure and limits of this kind of intense, needy female bonding. The saying goes that if men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament. Yet I keep thinking that if men could get pregnant, and Elisa Albert were Eli Albert, critical consensus would already be singing a chorus of praise for a novel that's both great and, unfortunately, uniquely American.

SARAH M. SELTZER *is a writer of fiction and nonfiction in New York City. She tweets at @sarahmseltzer.*

In Search of Valy

by Susan Weidman Schneider

An emerging genre of books seeks to reconstruct lives of people who vanished during the Holocaust. As the ranks of survivors themselves are dwindling, this probing is left to children, grandchildren, and sometimes even to strangers driven to know, from fragile clues about the lives lost, the facts and the feelings of those they've never known.

Paradigmatic of this search is the page-turning new memoir-cum-historical-uncovering by journalist **Sarah Wildman**, ***Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*** (Riverhead Books, $27.95). The person Wildman

REPRODUCTION, HEALTH, AND FEMINISM, INTIMATELY CONNECTED

In vitro fertilization—I.V.F.—is an assisted reproductive technology in which an egg is fertilized by sperm outside the body, and then implanted back in the uterus. Because it is often seen as the court of last resort for an individual or a couple addressing infertility, many news reports about I.V.F., even those purporting to be scientific, are framed as stories about families; they are private and personal, often tinged with tragedy, fear, or desperation. Prior to reading ***Biological Relatives: I.V.F., Stem Cells, and the Future of Kinship*** (Duke University Press, $26.95) by **Sarah Franklin**, I too thought of I.V.F. as a procedure that may have originated from science but was firmly rooted in the emotional realm.

However, Franklin's rigorously researched and exhaustive look at "the normalization of I.V.F." grounds the procedure firmly in technology and science, not to mention philosophy, anthropology, agriculture, feminism, and history. The first chapter alone includes multiple references to Marx and a brief journey through the Industrial Revolution, and while the connections do not always seem obvious, Franklin makes a persuasive case for just how large a debt I.V.F. owes to events and innovations that occurred hundreds of years in the past.

Biological Relatives is, first and foremost, an academic book. The language can be dense and complicated, and from the very first page Franklin assumes a certain level of knowledge on the part of the reader. Yet Franklin's analytical tone serves her material well, because it allows the reader to focus on how truly significant I.V.F. is as a technology and how far-reaching its continued use is—not just for those that have been personally affected by I.V.F. but for anyone with an interest in reproduction, feminism, gender equality and sexuality. As Franklin succinctly puts it, "In vitro fertilization is at once a technique, a model, an imitation of a biological process, a synthetic process, a scientific research method, an agricultural tool, and a means of human reproduction—of making life. It is an experimental model system with more than one life of its own."

The final chapter of this book deserves a special mention, as it includes Gina Glover, a photographer whose work includes a number of photographs inspired by I.V.F. technology. Neckties are reshaped and composed to represent sperm; hens' eggs, in pairs and alone, are cushioned in knitted cozies; pairs of geneticists' striped socks, lined up in a grid, are meant to mimic the chromosome strands photographed during genetic testing of a developing fetus; pre-implantation embryos are transposed onto images of stars and galaxies. Glover's photographs, as Franklin puts it, depict "a new frontier of biological relativity in which the social, the biological, and the technical are lived ambivalently together," and the inclusion of these images allow *Biological Relatives* to conclude on a deeply profound and surprisingly moving note.

No less profound is ***Seizing the Means of Reproduction: Entanglements of Feminism, Health, and Technoscience*** by **Michelle Murphy** (Duke University Press, $23.95). Like Franklin, Murphy is an academic. Her book is at the same time more accessible and narrower, choosing to devote its four chapters to answering a series of questions raised in the introduction: "How did reproduction, health, and feminism come to be so intimately connected in the late twentieth century's shadow of the American empire? …How were local feminist projects… made possible by larger historical conditions? … How does feminism's targeting of reproduction signal the centrality of sex to the emergence of present-day forms of governmentality?"

To answer these questions, Murphy looks at the rise of feminist health collectives and health practices in the U.S. during the 1970s and 1980s. Her fast-paced chapters take the reader deep into this world, and don't shy away from examining both the tensions within this period of feminist activism and the barriers

searches for is in fact no girl, but a doctor in her twenties. Valerie Scheftel was a medical-school colleague and the "true love" of her grandfather, who left her in Europe when he managed to escape to America in 1938.

What Wildman discovers about Valerie ("Your Valy" she signs her letters) reveals a woman very much of her time. On the one hand, Valy's proud professional life as a doctor—she had come alone to Vienna to attend medical school—was not constrained because she was a woman, but because she was a Jew. On the other hand, it was likely her female role as a good daughter that trapped her; after the Anschluss, it seems Valy cannot or will not abandon her mother to flee with her lover.

Wildman's detective work is both provoked and aided by the cache of letters discovered in a filing cabinet after her grandfather died, letters from those left behind in the Hades that Europe had become, begging for a recommendation, for the funds for passage to America, for intervention with professional organizations that might issue a life-saving invitation to work in the United States. The letters lay bare the horrible poignancy of how little money it would have taken to save those lives—Valy's included. But a penniless new immigrant himself, Karl Wildman couldn't manage even those modest sums.

Karl started a small-town medical practice in the face of anti-Semitism,

to a more patient-centered form of health care in the country as a whole. Murphy acknowledges the roles that race, class, and socioeconomics played in the feminist health movement. For instance, she offers a succinct summation of how two very different groups of feminists—predominately white women in Los Angeles and women of color in the Boston area—chose to address race and economics in their work and in their missions. Murphy doesn't pass judgment; rather, she allows the reader to make up her own mind about the benefits and drawbacks of their decisions, and her neutrality serves her material and readers well.

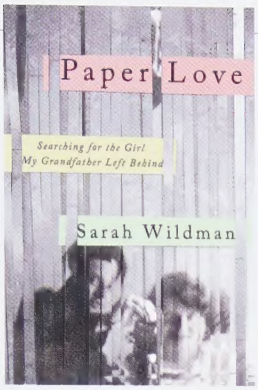
The events that Murphy writes about are more than three decades old, yet it is startling to realize just how relevant these questions are today. Much of the activism explored in *Seizing the Means of Reproduction* arose, at least in part, out of a desire to put reproductive healthcare decision-making in the hands of those most affected by it: women themselves. But, as the current social and political climate around women's rights, gender and reproduction makes clear, these issues continue to incite controversy and judgment today. And this knowledge adds a surprising poignancy not just to *Seizing the Means of Reproduction* but also to ***The Birth of the Pill: How Four Crusaders Reinvented Sex and Launched a Revolution*** (Norton, $27.95) by **Jonathan Eig**.

The "four crusaders" of the title are reproductive rights pioneer Margaret Sanger; scientist Gregory Pincus; Katharine McCormick, a wealthy widow; and John Rock, a Catholic ob/gyn. Sanger spearheaded the project and approached Pincus to develop a birth control pill; several years into the project Pincus, in turn, approached Rock for assistance with the medication's clinical trials. And all of this work benefited greatly from both the financial and ideological support of McCormick, a contemporary of Sanger's. Working at times together, at times separately, all four overcame substantial social, scientific, political and religious obstacles in the name of giving women a private and reliable way to have greater control over their fertility and, by extension, their lives.

Geneticists' socks, reconfigured to mimic chromosomes. Photo by Gina Glover from Biological Relatives.

Given that we all know the outcome of the story, *The Birth of the Pill* is surprisingly suspenseful. Neither Sanger nor McCormick had easy personal lives, and while Pincus's wife and children were accepting of his all-consuming work, his professional life was far from simple. Even Rock, a man who enjoyed a loving family, secure career, and respectable place in society, had to reconcile the teachings of his religion with his sincere belief that contraception was necessary for happy and healthy families.

Eig carefully balances an abundance of medical and scientific information with enough personal detail to make the actions and decisions of all four principals understandable. And he doesn't sugarcoat those actions, or the people behind them. Sanger could be "abrasive" and "obstinate," clashing at times with the leader-



married an American Jewish woman from an established family, and presented himself as a man of high culture and good spirits, living an identity both authentic and also—at the same time—crafted so as to keep the Holocaust years at a remove. Wildman unpacks, thanks to the letters, what her grandmother termed a "carefully curated history." Inheriting this legacy, tracking Valy in Berlin, Vienna and the Czech Republic while gestating "a little Jew" in her own womb, Wildman describes herself as very much a 21st- century Jew.

Paper Love is a real-life rendering of the quest undertaken in several recent works of fiction; Ayelet Waldman's *Love and Treasure*, a novel in which a grandfather's wartime past is unearthed via a piece of jewelry, is one example. It's not surprising that these quest books are coming one after another now. So much wrenching uncertainty about lives that ended with no known concluding chapter, so many stories untold, so much that can't now be retrieved except through fiction or the kind of empathic reconstruction of a life that Wildman assays here in her deeply compelling account of what likely happened to Valy.

SUSAN WEIDMAN SCHNEIDER

ship of Planned Parenthood, the organization she helped establish. For his part, Pincus's single-minded focus on his work likely helped cost him a professorship at Harvard, and also jeopardized the financial health and stability of the scientific institution that he helped found and run.

Eig also does a skillful job of making it clear to contemporary readers just how monumental was the very idea of this kind of contraception during the years of the pill's development, which began in the 1950s and was not fully completed until the '60s. It was no secret that a birth control pill taken only by women would give those women control not just over their reproduction, but over their sex lives. "Sex for the pleasure of women? … [I]t was dangerous. What would happen to the institutions of marriage and family? What would happen to love? If women had the power to control their own bodies, if they had the ability to choose when and whether they got pregnant, what would they want next?"

Those questions weren't mere rhetoric when Pincus and his colleagues began researching oral contraception in the mid-20th century. And they're not mere rhetoric today, either, as **Katha Pollitt** makes clear in her new book ***Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights***. (Full disclosure: While I don't know Pollitt, our paths have crossed professionally. I interviewed her years ago, and she both gave my own book a positive blurb and included it in *Pro*'s "Further Reading" section.) While it's public knowledge that abortion is becoming harder to access in many parts of the United States, what is less-often discussed is the very language that even those who identify as pro-choice use to talk about abortion. As Pollitt writes in her introduction, "Anywhere you look or listen, you find pro-choicers falling over themselves to use words like 'thorny', 'vexed', 'complex', and 'difficult'." Yet this narrative ignores the fact that for many women, having an abortion was not a painful or difficult decision. Consistently casting abortion in a negative light allows the speaker to judge an unknown woman, and assigns an unnecessary and unasked-for weight to a personal medical decision whose very legality is wrapped up in the right to privacy.

In eight brisk chapters, Pollitt makes a well-argued case that abortion can be "a moral right with positive social implications." She dismantles many of the anti-choice movement's arguments and justifications, but her greatest achievement may be in her engagement with the "muddled middle," those who think that "abortion should be legal, sort of, but it's wrong, sort of, and it shouldn't be too easy, and it shouldn't be too late, and the woman needs to think about it more, but also not wait too long, and most of all she should not be such an irresponsible slut…." Her focus on this audience—and on their assumptions, concerns, and stereotypes—allows Pollitt to place abortion and reproductive rights in the larger contexts of sexual equality, education, public health and parenthood. While Pollitt is far from the first person to make these connections, *Pro* is a timely reminder that despite the many scientific and medical advances around reproductive rights, the rights themselves cannot, and perhaps should not, be taken for granted.

"If women had the power to control their own bodies, to choose when and whether they got pregnant, what would they want next?"

SARAH ERDREICH *is the author of* Generation Roe: Inside the Future of the Pro-Choice Movement. *She lives in Washington, D.C.*

Stitching History from the Holocaust

In the winter of 1939, Paul Strnad wrote his cousin Alvin in Milwaukee. Desperate to obtain an affidavit to escape from Nazi Germany, Paul sent Alvin sketches by his talented dress-designer wife, Hedwig Strnad, hoping examples of her work would prove their financial independence. Despite Alvin's best efforts, both Hedwig and her husband Paul were murdered in the Holocaust. All that remained of their story were the letter and Hedwig's drawings. The Jewish Museum of Milwaukee worked with the costume shop of the Milwaukee Repertory Theater creating the dresses Hedwig sketched to tell the Strnad family story. A video tells how the unusual exhibition came to be, *youtube.com/watch?v=Kav9O_o-t1I&list=UUDttISJ8lpx_476pF3i3sfA*. Through February 28 in Milwaukee, then available for travel. *stitchinghistory.org*.

Fierce and Brave Females

Artist-activist Linda Stein, perhaps best know for her Wonder Woman paintings focusing on imaginary female heroes, is now focusing on real ones. For her new project she has produced tapestries of 10 women of particular bravery during the Holocaust: Anne Frank for her courage under duress and representing the loss of 1.5 million Jewish children. Ruth Gruber, the 104-year-old journalist who rode the ship Exodus and helped Holocaust survivor refugees. Vitka Kempner, a leader of the only known undefeated ghetto uprising. Noor Inayat Khan, the first female radio operator sent from Britain to aid the French resistance. Zivia Lubetkin, an underground leader in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. Nadezhda Popova, a military pilot in the Soviet Union. Hadassah Bimko Rosensaft, who worked in the Jewish infirmary at Auschwitz, and after liberation helped rehabilitate thousands of Jewish survivors. Hannah Senesh, who assisted in the rescue of Hungarian Jews. Yukiko Sugihara who encouraged her husband, Japan's consul in Kovno, Lithuania, to issue visas, saving 6,000 Jews. And Nancy Wake in the French Resistance, one of the Allies' most decorated wartime servicewomen. The project includes tapestries in leather, metal, canvas, paint, fabric, and mixed media, an illustrated catalogue with essays, limited-edition fine-art prints, a video about the artist's process, a teaching guide and public programs. *lindastein.com*.

A Tribute to the Disappeared

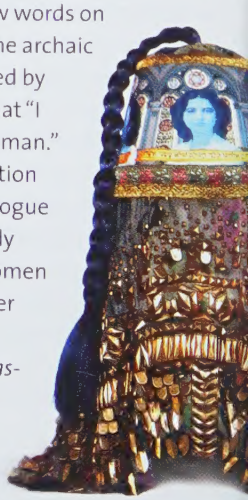
Artists and writers are invited by New York City-based visual artist Andrea Arroyo to participate in creating an "online quilt"—like the AIDS Memorial Quilt, only virtual—that will focus on another epidemic: the loss of lives to political "disappearances," from the 43 students in Ayotzinapa, Mexico, and the women of Juarez to all of the disappeared the world over. Jewish women in particular were among the disappeared in Argentina's Dirty War 1976–1983. To send literary and artistic contributions for the quilt project: *facebook.com/tributetothedisappeared*.

Jews, Arabs and Art

The Arab Museum of Contemporary Art and Heritage (AMOCAH) in the Galilee, opening in December, will showcase original works of contemporary art alongside items of Palestinian heritage, and will host artistic cooperation and collaboration between Jews and Arabs. "This museum is an opportunity for Jews and Arabs to meet, for their cultures to meet," says Israeli artist Avital Bar-Shay, one of the founders. The museum, located in Sakhnin's Old City, has more than 2,000 objects related to Palestinian Arab heritage and some 200 contemporary artworks. An artist-in-residence program is in the works. Following Operation Protective Edge last summer, the museum's launch was stepped up, in order to reduce the tensions between Jews and Arabs. The opening exhibit is "Hiwar," the Arabic word for "dialogue."

The Fez as Storyteller

Artist Camille Eskel's newest work explores the Baghdadi-Jewish experience in India that formed her family history and psychological legacy. Both grandfathers manufactured or traded fez caps, and the artist's hats carry information about identity, cultural influence, gender relationships, and intergenerational beliefs, practices and attitudes. The Hebrew words on this fez quote from the archaic morning prayer recited by men giving thanks that "I was not created a woman." The backdrop is a section of the Bombay synagogue Eskel's mother's family attended, and the women portrayed are from her family. *camilleeskell.com/gallery/the-fez-as-storyteller*



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Religous Women Dancing

Nehara, an Israeli dance troupe for professional female dancers who happen to be religious, aims to combine traditional values—such as not performing on Shabbat and being a women-only performance group—with dancing at its highest level. "Dance and religion do not mesh easily. On the contrary—they clash in almost every way possible. Yet, ever since I can remember, I have juggled my way between these two opposite worlds," says Daniella Bloch, founder and artistic director. Revolutionary within the dance world and within the Orthodox Jewish world, their performances are open to all audiences, Orthodox and secular, men and women. *neharadance.org*

Wartime Lullabies

"Birth in a Time of Bloodshed" is a CD anthology of lullabies from 18 conflict zones, sung in their original languages. The songs were collected by Israeli musician and storyteller Hanna Yaffe, whose goal is to emphasize the universality of lullabies and our shared humanity. The lullabies contain stark contrasts, with the melodies communicating sweetness and love, while the words relate fear, uncertainty and darkness. *lullabies-of-loss.org/#!lullabies/c1h6a*

Judaism & Islam in America

Sharing the Well: A Resource Guide for Jewish-Muslim Engagement features common themes such as caring for others, prayer and life cycle events, plus guidelines for dialogue. A joint project of Jewish Theological Seminary, Hartford Seminary and the Islamic Society of North America, it is the fruit of almost five years of academic workshops and community-based pilot projects. Contributors include Kim Zeitman, Karen Nell Smith, Joyce Schriebman, Sarah Sayeed, Suumaya Khalifa, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Maggie Siddiqu, Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin, Rabbi Amy Eilberg, Rabbi Ita Paskind, Rabbi Rachel Kahn-Troster and Rabbi Julie Schonfeld. Available as a hard copy and online as a free PDF. *isna.net/uploads/1/5/7/4/15744382/sharing_the_well_final.pdf*

Helena Rubinstein

"Beauty Is Power" is the first museum exhibition to focus exclusively on this cosmetics entrepreneur and patron of the arts, born in 1872 in a small town in Jewish Poland. By her death at 92, in 1965, Rubinstein was in her seventh decade of business, producing and marketing the means for ordinary women to transform themselves, and challenging the myth of beauty and taste as inborn, or something to which only the wealthy were entitled. If latter-day feminist debates have focused on cosmetics as objectifying women, they were seen in the early twentieth century as a means of asserting female autonomy, contributing to women's empowerment, and advocating exceptionality in a world that discouraged nonconformity. One's identity, Rubinstein asserted, is a matter of choice. At the Jewish Museum in New York through March 22. *thejewishmuseum.org*

Free the Nipple

A group of fearless women fight for their right to go topless in public, as they smash societal taboos one bare breast at a time. Based on a true story, this spirited satire follows New York City activists Liv and With, who take their crusade for gender equality from the streets of the urban jungle to the courts. More than just a movie, Free the Nipple has launched an empowering real-life movement, inspiring women across the globe to take back their bodies. *freethenipple.com*

Dreaming in Yiddish

The Adrienne Cooper Dreaming in Yiddish Fund was established in memory of the beloved pioneering teacher, researcher and performer of Yiddish music. (Cooper wrote about stories of intimate violence in Yiddish songs by women in Lilith, Spring 2011.) Now, with the support of her brother Michael Cooper, the Adrienne Cooper Archives will be housed at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. The fund also sponsors the annual Adrienne Cooper Dreaming In Yiddish Award Concert which supports risk-taking artists who are making art in, with and around Yiddish. *gohproductions.org* or email *marshagildin@gmail.com* or call 212 740-9644.

—compiled by Naomi Danis

For more, follow Lilith on Facebook and Twitter, and check out Lilith.org, where you can sign up for Lilith's free email newsletter. Send ideas for this section to info@Lilith.org.

PHOTO (TOP): TAMI WEISS. PAINTING: MARIE LAURENCIN, *PORTRAIT OF HELENA RUBENSTEIN*, 1934.

EXCUSE ME.

LIANA FINCK ANSWERS YOUR TINY QUESTIONS.

DEAR LIANA, I JUST MOVED FROM A STUDIO INTO A LARGE APARTMENT IN BROOKLYN WITH TWO ROOMMATES—
AND A KITCHEN THAT HAS A LOT OF CABINETS AND CUBBIES, NOT TO MENTION A FRIDGE, PACKED WITH THEIR TANTALIZING FOOD.
IT IS RARE TO FIND SOMETHING IN THIS WORLD THAT YOU WANT AS MUCH AS I WANT MY ROOMMATES' FOOD.
"WHAT IS LIGHT, IF SYLVIA BE NOT SEEN? WHAT IS JOY, IF SYLVIA BE NOT BY?"
I'VE TRIED BUYING THE SAME TYPES OF FOOD FOR MYSELF, BUT MY OWN FOOD DOESN'T TEMPT ME. I WANT TO EAT MY ROOMMATES' FOOD LATE AT NIGHT WHILE THEY'RE ASLEEP.
HELP?
CHEW. CHEW.
—FRIDGILANTE IN BROOKLYN.

DEAR FOODIE FROM HELL,

LET ME GUESS. YOU ARE PROBABLY THE KIND OF PERSON WHO EATS THE SAME SALAD FROM THE SAME MIDDLE-RANGE TAKEOUT PLACE EVERY DAY FOR LUNCH, AND SOMETIMES, ALSO, FOR DINNER. WHEN YOU MEET SOMEONE FOR LUNCH, YOU WILL MORE OFTEN THAN NOT ORDER SOMETHING SMALL AND CHEAP SO AS TO RELISH YOUR SALAD AFTERWARDS IN PRIVATE. YOU HAVE ALSO BEEN KNOWN TO LIVE ON BEETS. FOR BREAKFAST, AT TIMES WHEN YOU ARE "ON YOUR GAME," YOU WILL SIT IN A CAFE AND PULL A CHOCOLATE CROISSANT TO PIECES, EATING ONLY VERY SPECIFIC PARTS ACCORDING TO AN INTRICATE SET OF RULES. WHEN YOU ARE "OFF YOUR GAME," YOU WILL EAT THE WHOLE CROISSANT. YOU WILL EAT CROISSANTS. YOUR INTENSE URGES AND LOCK-JAWED OBSESSIVENESS FRIGHTEN AND DISGUST YOU. HERE IS MY NEXT HUNCH: YOU WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO ARTICULATE THESE FEELINGS IF THE OLD OBSESSIVENESS REALLY STILL HAD A HOLD ON YOU. YOU WOULD NOT HAVE MOVED IN WITH ROOMMATES IN BROOKLYN, EITHER. YOU'RE OK. LET ME TELL YOU THIS: IT'S NOT A HUGE DEAL TO EAT YOUR ROOMMATES' FOOD. FORGET THE GUILT. TRY THE FOOD. WHEN YOU HAVE AN INTENSE, OBSESSIVE THOUGHT, DON'T GIVE IN TO IT BLINDLY, BUT DON'T SHUT IT OUT EITHER. OBSERVE IT. FIND OUT WHERE IT COMES FROM. THE BETTER YOU KNOW YOUR FEELINGS, THE MORE YOU'LL BE ABLE TO GROW AND MOVE FORWARD, AND THE LESS LIKELY YOU'LL BE TO FACE THE KIND OF FRUSTRATED BOREDOM THAT TURNS YOUR ROOMMATES' OLD LEFTOVER RICE INTO A FEAST FOR THE GODS.

Liana Finck's graphic novel is A Bintel Brief. *She writes and draws a monthly column for The Forward and her cartoons appear irregularly in The New Yorker. Her graphic blog—"Excuse Me"—appears regularly at Lilith.org/blog.*